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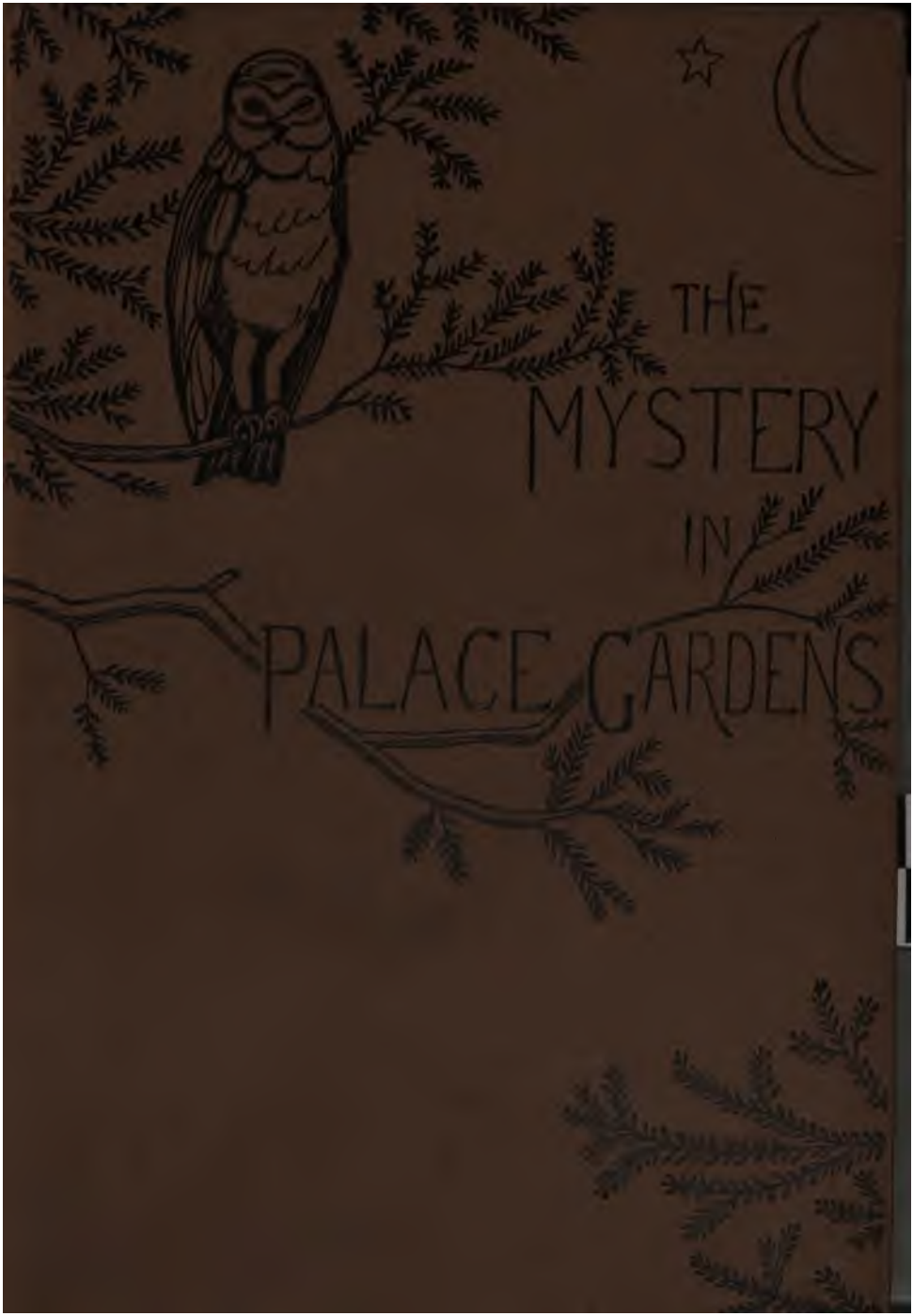
THE
MYSTERY
IN
PALACE GARDENS

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THE

MYSTERY IN PALACE GARDENS.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF 'GEORGE GEITH,' 'CITY AND SUBURB,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE

MYSTERY IN PALACE GARDENS.

CHAPTER I.

LOST.

Miss Aggles wrote the required letter. It was no addressed, however, to the vague future husband; for the straightforward spinster firmly declined to have any dealings, direct or indirect, with an unknown and nameless stranger, who might, as she expressed her opinions, 'be anybody.'

'I will put my determination on paper, if you like, Mira,' she said. 'I will tell you in black and white that I won't let the child go, and I will tell you why; and if he wants to know more he can write to me himself, or come and see me if he likes.'

'I don't think he will want to know more,' answered Mrs. Palthorpe; and there is no doubt she really did at the time believe her aunt's honest lan-

guage and strong expressions of attachment for the fatherless child would plead her excuse when she returned unsuccessful from her embassy. 'She will be far better where she is, too,' she decided, referring to Rachel. 'It is all nonsense his talking of bringing her up as if she was his own daughter.'

'We sha'n't see much of you now, I suppose?' remarked Miss Aggles the night before her niece's departure, as they paused for a moment at the top of the easy old-fashioned staircase, up and down which so many of the family had been carried in infancy, and borne not less tenderly to their long home.

'I will come whenever I can,' answered Mrs. Palthorpe; but though she spoke earnestly and as if she meant what she said, she knew perfectly well she never intended to enter the place again if things went as she hoped they would do.

It was the last night she should ever sleep in the room she had occupied when a girl. When she turned her back on the farm next day she should never see it more; she should not stroll again beside the river, or walk in the orchard and pluck the Jeannetton apples that were such a lovely sight

just then on the trees, or look in the moonlight up the hill, thinking of what might have been, or listen to the doves cooing in the woods and the corncrake in the meadows, watch the milkers with their pails, and hear between sleeping and waking in the dewy hours of the summer mornings the sound of the mowers sharpening their scythes and the swish-swish of the falling grass.

All old things she intended to cast behind her when she commenced leading a new life, one in which her position as a wife and mistress of a household would be recognised—when she would have done with doubt and fear and be able to speak freely, without the dread that had latterly oppressed her, dogging every word she said.

When she thought of the assured future before her, of the termination of suspense, of the certainty that she would be well provided for, she felt glad; and yet not to feel a little sorry at the idea of never seeing the old place again, she must have been less human than was the case.

For, even granting she did not care for any creature living there—and, indeed, she cared little for

any creature living anywhere save herself—the things she was actually bidding farewell to were so fully part and parcel of her youth, that in saying good-bye to them she could not help feeling she was leaving behind many pleasant things which might meet her again on her way through life nevermore.

Her girlhood, the hopes and dreams it held, the freshness of her early beauty, her freedom, her innocence. Through the old-fashioned house she had played, as Rachel played now; the orchard had been to her as the Garden of Eden, about which her grandfather talked often as they walked beside the river; she had made chains of daisies and dandelions sitting in the shade under the chestnut-trees; there was a swampy place in the water-meadows where she found rushes to make into parasols and butterfly-cages and swords; there was not a hedge about the farm she had not searched for birds'-nests, not a corner of the squire's plantations she had not traversed looking for peahens' eggs.

It all came back to her as she lay that night in bed, the wind softly rustling through the open windows, the stars shining in upon her just as they

used to do. Her heart was not softened, but it was sad; the loneliness of the silent country oppressed her, the solemnity of night troubled her. She could not sleep for thinking of the past and the future, wondering what the farm would be like when her grandfather died, marvelling about the changes time might produce in herself.

And she had never thought so much in all the years since he left England of her dead husband as she did that night.

'After all it was hard for him,' she thought, for the first time a feeling of pity stirring her soul. 'It was hard for him to lose that fine place, and then his health, and then his life.'

'Then his life,' the silent voices of the night seemed, in some dumb fashion, to repeat.

Some day she would have to lose her life, and lie still and quiet. Well, she hoped before it came to that she might be able to take a great deal of enjoyment out of existence.

'Of course we must all die some time,' she thought, getting up and looking out of the window at the fair landscape, half-shrouded by night's sha-

dows, lying stretched below. 'Some go soon, and some go late;' and then, having quite decided that she would go late, that nothing ever was amiss with her, that she would live as long as her grandfather, or longer, she once more sought her pillow, and soon fell fast asleep.

She was awakened by the morning sun streaming into the room, by the voices of the reapers as they came up the lane, by the song of a thrush perched on the topmost branch of a tree near her window, by the trillings of the larks away down in the meadows, and the twittering of a hundred sparrows chattering all together on the roof. Looking out between the leaves which clustered over the window, she could see the winding river, the rich pasture-lands, the spreading cornfields she meant never to behold more.

Rising, she dressed herself hurriedly; and going softly down-stairs, opened the front door and went out into the sunshine.

'I will walk up to the hill,' she said; 'likely I shall never look on it again.'

She climbed the hill, and sauntered through the

plantations. The dew lay wet on the grass, and glittered as though millions of diamonds had been scattered broadcast over the land. There were peacocks in the grounds spreading their magnificent tails to the sun. She made her way to a yew-hedge cut into all manner of fantastic shapes, which sheltered what had always been called 'Madam's flower-garden' from the easterly winds, a pleasant sheltered nook lying underneath some of the side-windows of the Hall. Through one of the green arches formed in the yew-hedge the wanderer, who thought to have been mistress there, stood and looked at the house. As she looked the memory of the bygone returned and dwelt with her: the dreams she had dreamt, the castles she had built, the fancies she had woven, the scenes she had pictured, they all came round her, each with its familiar face and remembered associations.

With a deep sigh she turned away, the smell of the heliotrope floating in the air after her, the yellow roses still peeping at her over the hedges as she passed along, the scent of sweetbrier grateful to the senses, passion-flowers climbing with the roses.

'Ah, it was a pretty place,' she said, as though the place, like the hopes she had cherished, were gone; 'a pretty place. I don't know that I ever thought so much of it before.'

She wandered through all the winding walks up to the very top of the hill, where she had stood so many and many a time with him, watching the white sails of the ships in the distance; and then she slowly retraced her steps, and walked a little along the lane, which led from Sunnydown Farm into the main road to Ravelsmede.

As she paused by the gate for a moment on her return, dreamily looking up into the elder-bushes and the acacia-trees that sheltered it, the postman came by. He was early afoot, as most postmen have to be in the country, and, being an old inhabitant, he had of course known Mrs. Palthorpe from a child.

'Anything for the farm?' she asked, stretching out her hand.

'Only one,' he answered, giving the letter to her.

Then he went rapidly on his way; but she stood still.

Going into the great kitchen in the farmhouse

some ten minutes later, Miss Aggles was surprised to find her niece standing beside the fire. There chanced to be no one else in the kitchen—the cook had crossed over to the dairy and the housemaid was laying the breakfast-cloth in the parlour. Mrs. Palthorpe had the place to herself, and she was, poker in hand, holding something down amongst the coals, and watching the blaze as it flared into powder.

'I did not know you were up, Mira,' said Miss Aggles.

Still holding down that something, which was now little save dust and ashes, Mrs. Palthorpe turned towards the speaker.

'Lord bless me, what is the matter?' cried Miss Aggles. 'Mira, what is wrong with you?'

But Mrs. Palthorpe did not answer. She only gave the poker an extra push, carefully raked the glowing coals over the something they had consumed, flattened the surface of the fire with a curious deliberation, and then stood shivering like one stricken by an attack of ague.

'Are you ill, Mira?' asked her aunt.

'Yes, I think so;' and the voice which answered

did not sound like Mrs. Palthorpe's. 'I will go upstairs, aunt, if you please.'

Miss Aggles only waited to call the housemaid, and hurried after; but quick though she might be, Mrs. Palthorpe had been quicker. She had managed to hurry up the stairs, to reach the familiar apartment, to cross the floor, to throw herself into the great armchair which stood beside the bed, and then she fell into a dead faint.

At the sight, Miss Aggles' tenderness was all aroused. 'My poor girl, my dear Mira!' she murmured, as she sprinkled water over the white frightened face, and held salts to her nostrils, and unfastened her dress and rubbed her hands. 'What is the matter? what can have happened?' she thought; and then all in a moment there came a horrified pause in her ejaculations, a pause during which she hastily shut and locked the door, and pressed her hands over her eyes, and stood still and silent, trying to realise that which she dreaded.

After a short time Mrs. Palthorpe recovered sufficiently to understand where she was and what had happened.

'I fainted, aunt, I think,' she said.

'Yes,' answered Miss Aggles, with a terrible brevity.

'Did I say anything?'

'Not that I heard.'

'That anybody heard?' persisted Mrs. Palthorpe, with painful earnestness.

'There was nobody to hear,' said her aunt.

For a minute there ensued silence; then Mrs. Palthorpe began to speak again.

'Isn't breakfast ready?'

'I daresay it is.'

'I wish you would go down to it, then, and never mind me. I am all right now, and I would rather be alone.'

'Just as you like,' replied Miss Aggles. 'Shall I bring you up anything?'

'Send me a cup of tea, please,' said Mrs. Palthorpe, struggling into an upright position, and looking about her with dazed wild eyes that had as yet no faculty of settled observation in them; 'that is all I want.'

'Very well;' having uttered which brief remark,

Miss Aggles moved to the door. Before she opened it, however, she came back again, and said, 'God help you, Mira,' as though the words were wrung out of her.

'God help me, indeed!' repeated Mrs. Palthorpe excitedly; 'if you knew everything you might say that with more meaning.'

'Won't he marry you, then?' asked Miss Aggles curiously.

'He—who?' cried Mrs. Palthorpe. 'O, I expect so; I hope he will.'

'And so do I,' said her aunt. 'Now we won't talk about it any more at present. Keep yourself quiet, and I will bring you up some tea.'

'O me!' groaned Mrs. Palthorpe, laying her head wearily against the back of the chair. 'O dear, dear me!'

She had her tea and a slice of thin bread-and-butter with it, and then, contrary to custom, for she was by nature a restless creature, she remained sitting quietly for a couple of hours, crushed apparently by the weight of some heavy blow.

'You will not think of going back to London

to-day, Mira,' Miss Aggles had said when she brought the breakfast-tray up to her niece; and for answer Mrs. Palthorpe said wearily, 'Thank you, aunt.'

Towards midday, shaking off the weakness which had overpowered her, she rose, and after laving her face and hands, and bathing her head till her hair was soaked with wet, put on her bonnet and a light shawl, and proceeding down-stairs, told her aunt she thought of going for a little walk.

'The air will do me good,' she said.

'Keep under the shade of the trees, then,' advised Miss Aggles, 'for the sun is very powerful.'

'Don't wait dinner for me,' went on Mrs. Palthorpe; 'I could not eat anything.'

'You can have a morsel whenever you come in,' said Miss Aggles; 'there is some trout Betty shall cook for you if you could fancy that.'

'Thank you, aunt.' Mrs. Palthorpe was strangely subdued and quiet.

'And, Mira, if there is aught it would be an ease to your mind to tell me, don't be afraid to speak.' Miss Aggles pretended to be looking in her

work-basket for a needle as she said this, and did not even glance at her niece.

'You are very good,' Mrs. Palthorpe answered; but she did not add that she had a weight on her mind, or that if there were she meant to tell it.

She went slowly out of the room, turning at the door to give one wistful look around it; she trod the oaken floor of the hall and crossed the threshold once so familiar; she passed through the orchard, where the Jeannetton apples had gathered a richer colour since the previous day, and walked straight to the field where her grandfather stood watching the labours of the reapers, who that morning had come up the lane talking cheerily in the early sunshine as they strode onward to their work.

It seemed to her as though years instead of hours had passed since she heard their voices. Life had changed for her totally, completely, since she listened to the song of the thrushes and the matins of the larks. It could not be that it was only that morning she had walked up to the Hall, and stood looking at the peacocks and Madam's

flower-garden, and the closed blinds in the bedrooms, when no one was awake.

In the fields they were reaping the rich brown grain; the seed she had scattered she was yet to garner. Dreamily she went on, dreamily, yet with the step of one who is going forward to an end determined upon previously.

'Are you better, Miry?' asked her grandfather, coming to meet her with an anxious look on his furrowed face. 'Your aunt said you had been taken with a faintness.'

'I am better, grandfather,' she answered, still with that unaccustomed gentleness influencing voice and manner. 'It was the heat, I suppose.'

'You don't look strong, as you used to do,' said the old man, with a jealous ring in his voice. 'You have lost your colour and your spirits. Ah, they may talk as they like about London, but there is no air like Hampshire air.'

'There is not, indeed, grandfather,' she answered, humouring his fancy.

'You are not going to leave us to-day, are you, my dear?' asked the farmer, feeling that perhaps

when she belonged to the strange unknown man who, as Miss Aggles declared, might be anybody, they would have less share in her than ever.

'Aunt kindly said I might stop,' she hesitated.

'Said you might stop! Don't talk that way, Miry; you know you have been always welcome here to come and stay as long as you liked, and for that matter to stay altogether; and you will be welcome still—yes, still, though I do think you might have kept on your black a while longer for the man as lost everything through you.'

'Don't, grandfather; please don't!'

'Well, I won't, then, my girl; only don't you talk in that way about being let stop and suchlike. Stop altogether would be best; but there, I must not say any more, I suppose.'

She touched his hard brown hand for an instant, and then, after speaking about other matters for a few minutes, walked slowly away.

She did not return to dinner; but then she had said she should not do so.

The afternoon passed by, the long sultry after-

noon with clouds coming up betokening a thunder-storm. Tea-time arrived; still no Mira.

'I wonder where she can have gone,' marvelled Miss Aggles musingly.

'I suppose she hasn't taken the notion and flown off all of a sudden,' suggested the farmer.

'She would not do that,' said his daughter positively; and yet when tea was over she went up-stairs to see if her niece's belongings were still there.

Yes, still there; her little bag, her cloak, her umbrella, her brush and comb, her night-clothing.

'I wonder where she is,' thought Miss Aggles.

Shortly afterwards, having occasion to go to the desk where all her papers and accounts were kept she chanced to notice, first, that the letter written at Mrs. Palthorpe's request, and which had been left sealed up just inside the top division, was missing; and second, that another letter that had come to the farm for Mr. Palthorpe, and which of course had never been delivered to him, was absent also.

Miss Aggles looked carefully for both, but could not find them.

'It is not once in six months I leave the key in

the lock,' she considered meditatively; 'but I did leave the desk open to anybody to-day.' She went up-stairs again and looked in Mrs. Palthorpe's bag; the letters were not there. Then she put on her bonnet, and saying to her father, 'I am going down to Ravelsmede, and I will call and bring Rachel back with me,' set out along the dusty road.

It was a birthday of one of the children at the rectory, and Rachel had been asked to join in the festivities.

Miss Aggles walked fast, and ere half an hour appeared at the rectory door.

'I have come for Miss Rachel,' she said to the servant who opened the door.

'She went home long ago, miss,' answered the man. 'Her ma came and fetched her before luncheon.'

Miss Aggles fell back against one of the pillars supporting the verandah.

'There must be some mistake,' she was beginning, all of a tremble, when good Mr. Frants suddenly appeared and drew her into the library.

'Don't keep me, I must go,' she implored;

but he soothed her, and she told him what she feared.

All that evening, and all the next day, they searched for traces of Mrs. Palthorpe and her child. They telegraphed to London; they put the matter in the hands of the police; they offered rewards; but all in vain. If the mother and daughter had vanished off the face of the earth they could not have disappeared more completely.

Most of the money put aside so carefully in the bank was spent in prosecuting the fruitless search; and, a goodly sum for people so situated, fifty pounds was at length, through the columns of the *Times*, offered to 'any one who should give such information,' &c.

This elicited a response.

A few lines arrived from Mrs. Palthorpe, telling them the child was well and happy; and the letter bore the postmark of a town in a foreign country very far away.

'I shall never see her more, then,' sobbed the poor old farmer, when he heard the words read out; 'never. The little lass that was always at my heels

like a dog, and had her father's honest blue eyes, and was the last of the old stock, and brought me my slippers, and said she was "ganfader's tessure" —I'll never see her more.'

He was right; till they meet in The Kingdom he will never see the 'little lass,' grown to womanhood, again.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

EMPTY no longer, the house in Palace Gardens became all at once the scene of frantic activity, a field for speculation of every description. People who did not know the Moffats in the least, who were never likely to know them, talked concerning the new tenants as though the occupancy of Holyrood House were certain to prove a matter of considerable importance to the speakers.

Given that a man in London be rich enough or notorious enough, and it is a mistake to suppose his outgoings and his incomings are regarded with no curiosity by his neighbours. Why, not only one half of all the idle folks living round and about the neighbourhood of Palace Gardens, but more than half of all the busy householders also, had something to say on the subject. Shopkeepers stood on the tip-toe of expectation. To serve such a family, say

with prime joints; to wait upon them for orders; to send in groceries and butter and cheese and vegetables, would be delightful occupations. Saddlers considered how much they would tip the coachman; plumbers left their cards with a hopeful eye to severe winters and hard frosts. Corn-dealers wondered whether Sir John would patronise local tradesmen, or whether he had his oats direct from Mark-lane. Even undertakers sent circulars embellished and illustrated in a ghastly manner; and a man in the statuary way of business enclosed a descriptive pamphlet containing designs of every sort of hideous monument that could be erected to the memory of any dear departed.

These various tributes of respect and evidences of confidence in his solvency accumulated upon the marble slab in Sir John's hall, as orders to view had formerly done. Finally there came a day when they too were swept into the dust-heap, to make way for cards of a different description, which fell upon Holyrood House thick as hail. Many 'desirable' people had visited the Seatons; but many more were desirous of visiting the Moffats. If a man

wanted to hide his light under a bushel, Palace Gardens was a bad place to select for the operation; and the house in the locality that Sir John Moffat had bought the worst he could have chosen with a view to isolation.

A mansion attached to which is 'a story' should never be purchased by a man solicitous of privacy. Some portion of the notoriety compassed by his predecessors is sure to descend to him; and ere long this retiring unobtrusive gentleman found that a large amount of notoriety had been, so to speak, capitalised about the place, and the interest accumulated for him. Further, in a great town, where a plain Mister may be anybody, a Sir—even if he be only a knight—is regarded by the outside world as somebody.

There were many people—hundreds, thousands—who thought even a vague Sir John a very great person indeed; how much greater, then, did he seem when it was known he had actually bought the house Mr. Seaton had decamped from! that he had money to buy it, money to furnish it, money to keep it up as 'such an establishment ought to be kep,' to

quote the words of one of the 'purveyors' who rushed to deliver cards!

Such a parading in and out of workpeople, such measuring, such critical contemplation on the part of the British artisan, such a running to and fro of a boy from the nearest public, such rearing of ladders and wheeling in of hand-carts, and hurried visits on the parts of master tradesmen, such an invasion of all the rooms, such smoking in solemn conclave when the heat and burden of a couple of hours' work had grown beyond endurance to the skilled labourers, who, if their own account might be trusted, were only too conscientious as regards their time.

It was, indeed, a sight to behold them at the breakfast-hour. When the clock began to strike the tools were laid down as though work had been arrested by the wand of a magician; and ere the last stroke of eight died away not a man was left on the premises save one, who elected to warm his tea over a fire in the library.

'Nothing could exceed,' we are told, 'the speed with which Paddy-go-easy went to his meals, except the reluctance with which he returned from

them;' and the same remark applies to the 'three-branch' and other 'hands' who were employed in the renovation of Holyrood House.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Hemans, looking in at the gate on one occasion when a body of workmen were sauntering leisurely up the drive, 'ah!' and the old lady shook her head solemnly.

No doubt she thought the place had been 'more like a place' while it stood dark and empty and silent, and she was 'in residence.'

There were others who said 'Ah!' and added other remarks to that exclamation.

Old ladies of Conservative tendencies, who wondered why 'City people' did not 'live over their shops;' smart clerks, who lodged in less desirable neighbourhoods than Palace Gardens, but who still put themselves to an enormous amount of inconvenience in order to be able to head their notepaper with a West-end address, stopped on Sunday afternoons to look at the residence, and wondered audibly 'how long *that* would last.'

There was a man of modest tastes, who, in a shockingly bad hat and shabby coat and frayed

collar and trousers carefully turned up round the bottom, said,

'That is not the sort of house I would have taken had I been Sir John Moffat. A nice place up the river, now, with a boat-house and lawn sloping to the water's edge—that style of thing, eh?'

There were the envious of all ranks and classes and parties, who thought things were very unfairly distributed, and asked, 'Let parsons say what they like, why should one man be able to buy a house in Palace Gardens, and another live in dread of his life because of the coming man in possession in Angelica-terrace, though he only stood at eight-and-twenty, and precious dear for all he got for the money, too?'

There were the cynical, who fancied Sir John had made a mistake if he thought the mere fact of living in Palace Gardens would pass him free into 'society,' meaning theirs; but, as a rule, it was felt if a City man must live in Palace Gardens, a better than Sir John Moffat could not be found.

'He is more than a merchant prince, my dear,' said one lady effusively. 'He is a philanthropist.'

'And might have been a baronet,' capped her

friend, in a tone which implied she considered that would have been much better.

It is a remarkable fact that, no matter how admirable the order in which a house may be when vacated, the incoming occupant always finds it necessary to put the place in substantial and ornamental repair from garret to cellar.

The Compulsory Act, under which these operations have to be performed, seems to imply a promise to the victim that any further outlay and trouble will thus be avoided after he is once in occupation. It is a vain delusion, and perhaps Sir John knew this when he positively refused to allow the master spirits, whose aid had been invoked, to work their sweet will on every apartment in the house.

What they desired was totally to destroy, and then cheerfully to create. In a light and airy manner they sketched out a plot, and assured him of their capability to fill in. Nothing about the place met with their approval. If they could have been permitted to pull down and rebuild the mansion, they would have been perfectly happy; but as

matters stood they could do a great deal—they could so improve Holyrood House, that if Sir John wished to sell again he could get double the money he had paid for it. Precisely the same remark was made to Mr. Seaton when he took counsel with similar ministering angels.

'You'll repent it, Sir John,' said one enthusiastic individual, who had been revelling in parquet and frescoes and marbles, and rolling and unrolling some of the most hideous paper-hangings that were ever evolved out of the inner consciousness of perverted taste. 'You'll excuse my saying so; but you might reproach me in your own mind hereafter if, being accustomed to such matters, I did not give you warning now. This sort of thing'—and he contemptuously indicated the barbaric decorations of the room in which they happened to be standing at the moment—'was very well in its way, no doubt, thought very fine once; but it won't do for you, Sir John; it won't, indeed!'

'It did for Mr. Seaton, and it will do for me,' answered Sir John mildly, but decidedly. 'It is not my intention to spend all the money I possess

in remodelling the house, and we will therefore leave these apartments'—and he touched a list lying on the chimneypiece—'as they are. You will take your instructions from Lady Moffat cencerning the drawing-room.'

And having so spoken, he walked slowly across the hall and down into the garden, from which point he contemplated the yews in Kensington, as though they were the finest prospect in the world.

'I never did—there, I never see a gentleman throw less heart into a place than Sir John throws into this!' remarked the master tradesman to his second in command.

'Not a bit of life about him. Holyrood House might be a cabin for all the interest he takes in beautifying it, or a pigsty for that matter,' was the appreciative reply.

'I call it mean almost,' said the principal.

'I call it mean altogether,' improved the subordinate. 'It is downright disheartening, that's what it is!'

'And we could have worked in that lot of papers to advantage,' sighed his chief.

'We must try and get in some of them,' said his echo. 'Whatever can he see in that garden to moon about it as he does?'

'Not a lawn-party, with the Queen and Prince of Wales walking over in a friendly way from the Princess of Teck's, I should imagine,' said the disappointed tradesman, with cutting irony, which his satellite applauded with a laugh.

But if Sir John failed to gratify pecuniary speculation and upset commercial calculation, what was to be said about Lady Moffat?

Well, only this—that, whilst gratifying the thirst for destruction exhibited by those who had a direct interest in destroying the labours of others, she vexed the souls of the men with whom she came in contact by offending their æsthetic tastes.

Whatever chanced to be the fashion seemed to them high art; and as the things Lady Moffat admired were of the loudest and showiest description, it may be imagined how her ideas jarred at every turn against the notions of the severe, subdued, and sad-toned school, which at that period was teaching the beauty of dark rooms and dingy hangings and

uncomfortable furniture to a people whose lot is cast in a land where everything is dark enough and dingy enough and uncomfortable enough by reason of the climate, without the assistance of art being called in to make life drearier still.

It is perfectly true that her ladyship's views, when expounded, made her hearer shiver; and indeed the mirrors, the gilding, the white enamel, and the various items to match might have induced a chill in the marrow of any bystander.

Lady Moffat had once, in the house of a certain Mrs. Kenley, seen a drawing-room decorated and furnished in a manner which met with her approval, and she was now determined to what she called 'follow out her fancy.'

No one could accuse her of indifference about Holyrood House. She neither rested herself nor let any other person rest till the alterations were accomplished, and the residence at Carlton Hill vacated. She came in her carriage, not on foot, as was Sir John's modest habit, to urge the workmen on.

She wore out the foreman's patience with her constant cry for him to 'finish,' 'finish,' 'finish!'

'Men can't do more than they can, your ladyship,' he once ventured to hint.

'Then get more men,' she returned, and 'fell,' as one of the skilled labourers declared, 'to pacing up and down that terrace as though she meant to wear it out.' 'She's a termagant, I'll be bound,' he finished; 'I shouldn't care to be in his shoes, though she had a purse, they do say, as long as his own.'

Guessing who she had been, do you wonder if, as she paced that terrace, her thoughts ever reverted to a path she had traversed in the days so long ago departed?

If you do, it might be answered that she never thought of those days, save with contempt and irritation. Time had done wonders for her: it had almost enabled her to forget the sudden blow that struck her with a force and cruelty for which death had then seemed mercy. In every respect, save in temper and heart, it had changed her completely—her voice had altered, her accent improved, her manners become to a certain extent conventional. She had read that she need not seem a perfect ignoramus, improved her book-lore so that her own children might not put her

to shame. She was quick, and had caught up a certain jargon which served the purpose of conversation well enough. She pretended to take an interest in many things for which she did not care one straw. She could talk just like the bulk of women, and she was able in many respects to comport herself like anybody else. The usages of society came now familiar to her; etiquette she could discourse concerning as glibly as most people. Her temper passed current for spirit, and her imperious manner was attributed to pride.

Pride! Sir John smiled quietly when this quality chanced to be mentioned in his presence in connection with his wife. He was humble enough; any small measure of happiness he ever conceived possible could only, he felt, have been compassed in some lowly valley; and yet there he was, against his own inclinations, set high upon a hill.

People talk about greatness being thrust upon a man. Sir John knew the fallacy of such a statement, if it meant not having to be paid for.

'As shopkeepers,' he said once simply, 'press a silk or velvet upon a woman, and eventually charge

it high in her bill, so, whenever Fate makes a man famous or rich or renowned, she takes good care to enter the transaction in her ledger, and makes him eventually settle the demand, though it takes the last halfpenny he possesses.'

Greatness had been thrust upon Sir John, so he knew. Holyrood House was part of the penalty—certainly the last residence he would have thought of buying; Palace Gardens the last place in which he would have thought of living.

When he saw his wife sweeping through the rooms, rustling along the corridors, and coming down the stairs, he looked at her sometimes with a startled and terrible surprise.

How could she forget? If she had no heart—of which great lack in her mental organisation he was aware—and no conscience, a generally considered necessary that had been entirely overlooked in her organisation—had she no memory?

Was the past wiped so completely out of her recollection, that it left no mark, no lines even half erased? She knew what had been; she knew what *she* had been. She could not fail to remember all

she had forsaken, all she had trampled under foot. Two thousand years would not have sufficed to wear the traces of his sin out of his weary heart; and yet she voluntarily rushed into everything which caused the iron to enter more deeply into his own soul, and chafed the old unhealed wounds that lay hidden under the outward habiliments he wore.

'Beware of the first lie,' he was wont to say kindly sometimes to youths he was starting in the world.

'Beware of the first lie.' Out of his own experience he had gathered this wisdom. 'It may-be afterwards,' he thought, 'a man will never find himself able to speak the honest truth again. If I had that morning in July, twenty-one long years ago, spoken the simple truth, instead of suppressing part of it, my life might have been different, I think. John Hay, John Hay Moffat: it was a small matter to involve such consequences. John Hay could do what John Hay Moffat could not and would not have done; that is the rock on which the whole of my later life came to grief. Such a trifling falsehood too, it seemed, and uttered with no ill intent. Well,

well; a small leak, that the tip of a child's finger might stop at first, will eventually serve to sink a ship.'

It was such things he often considered, observed by the workmen, looking at the dark yews in Kensington Gardens standing black and solitary against the sky. A quiet man, with reserved manners, who did not talk much, and who never thrust himself forward—a 'retiring thoughtful sort of person,' ladies decided. He was not a favourite with the sex.

As a rule it is, we know, the large, bold, swaggering, loud-voiced, pushing specimens of male humanity that, in all ranks, women most delight to honour. Tenderness, sensitiveness, refinement of mind and expression, a deep-seated sense of unworthiness, an earnest desire to walk through life led by an unseen guide who leads along a path often sharp with stones, frequently beset with briers, is not the type of masculine excellence which finds favour in the eyes of beauty. A very 'plain man,' said many ladies, thinking of the more florid style which had captivated their young imaginations; and Lady Moffat would

have agreed with their finding, if this verdict had been delivered in her presence.

Nature is perfectly well aware what she is about, and knows the men who beat their wives, and assert their supremacy by other such acts, simply supply a want. A man who beat her might have won some respect from Lady Moffat; but the man who tried to do his duty towards her she cordially disliked. With the ball at his feet, she did not understand why he could not be induced to take advantage of every so-called happiness the world offered. That he had never ceased to reproach himself, she was well aware; that the image of the man over whom the waters had closed in merciful oblivion was never long absent from his thoughts, she understood as well as he did; but the knowledge only made her angry.

'Moaning and fretting about what can't be undone,' she thought; 'such nonsense and folly!'

And to her it seemed such, indeed; for she had no comprehension that it was the very sense of inability to repair the evil he had wrought—the very

consciousness that, though life was all before him to repent, the power of atonement lay with him no longer—which infused the bitterest drop into the cup he had to drain.

For him there was no pleasure in the sunshine or melody in song; no gladness in the spring-time, or delight in the glories of summer. As a sick man might look on a fair landscape, so he, with tired soul, regarded the exceeding beauty of earth. Fair to others it might be, but as for him he fancied its loveliness throughout the years to come would be spread all in vain.

From society he shrank with the morbid sensitiveness of a man conscious of a concealed sore and dreading the touch of every careless finger. Greatness, fashion, rank, the world's applause, what were all these things to him, with the secret he was trying to keep from his fellows gnawing at his breast? He desired no visitors; he did not wish for company; a mere corner of all that grand house would have been more than enough for him; a life more humble and less intrusive would have seemed more fitting, he thought, than all the glare and hurry and luxury

and prominence amid which so unexpectedly he found himself.

But Lady Moffat thought far otherwise. She had lived 'mewed up' long enough, she told him; she intended now to take some enjoyment out of existence. If *he* felt himself too old to take a pleasure in parties and society, she assured him *her* case was different.

'The children must have friends, she must have friends; they could not go on as they had been doing; why, every one she met was amazed and disappointed never to have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with her before.'

CHAPTER III.

A WONDERFUL WOMAN.

Amongst the first callers at Holyrood House was a certain Miss Banks—the very first caller indeed; for it was a specialty of that lady to assist at the social birth and social death of all the many rich and delightful friends she made and—dropped. She had known the Seatons, and she had gone to the house the very moment she heard of Mr. Seaton's departure with the intention of offering her sympathy to Mrs. Seaton, only that lady refused to see any one. She had penetrated from basement to attic when the 'valuable and fashionable,' &c., were on view. She had attended the auction and jotted down the prices the things fetched; and she had since accompanied several persons with 'orders to view' who thought or who did not think the desirable mansion might suit them as a residence.

Surely there never was a woman with so large an

acquaintance. She knew everybody and everybody knew her. She made friends with the Joneses by telling them she had heard so much of them from the Robinsons, and she procured the *entrée* to the Smiths by exactly the same means.

In her style of conversation she adopted towards great persons, or persons who wished to be considered great, a tone of humility which met with much approval.

'It does not matter upon whom I call,' she would often say. 'I am so insignificant a body, it is of no consequence what I do.'

And it was for this reason, perhaps, that Miss Banks constantly seemed throwing herself up in the air to determine which way the wind blew. She decided the social positions of more new-comers to the old suburb than could well be imagined.

'Delightful family, Miss Banks says.'

'Charming woman, Miss Banks tells me.'

'Quite an acquisition to the neighbourhood, Miss Banks declares.'

'Not at all nice people, Miss Banks fears.'

'Something odd about them, Miss Banks thinks.'

'Miss Banks advises caution about visiting them.'

As to who Miss Banks herself was, very few people sifted that mystery to the bottom. Simply as Miss Banks—such a wonderful woman, such a manager, such a useful person, such a reliable creature, such a martyr, such a gleam of sunshine, such a cheerful help in time of trouble—she was known to an enormous number of people resident in Kensington and various other parts of London. She was acquainted with many extraordinary folk, who might have seemed to be, and who indeed were, quite out of her own set; but she found them useful in some way, the reader may be quite sure of that, or Miss Banks would have dropped them, as she was in the habit of dropping those who could not, she found, in any way advance her interests. Only in a great city could such a woman as Miss Banks have grown to full perfection. In any small town she must soon have exhausted the list of persons willing to be deceived, and forced even by the instinct of self-preservation to cultivate some human sentiment in her friendships.

Ladies were almost unanimous in Miss Banks' praise. Some men evidently had their doubts upon the subject; but then, as their wives said, 'Poor Miss Banks is neither young nor pretty.' Young she certainly was not, and she had never been pretty; but though reasons such as these might have induced great admiration in the feminine mind, they had not much to do with a certain hesitation masculine lips seemed to feel in sounding her praises.

On the whole, perhaps, they had a little too much of Miss Banks; the best song is apt to pall if sung too often, and the lady seemed to pervade her friends' firesides.

She resided with her brother-in-law in a freehold tenement which belonged to that gentleman, and was squeezed in amongst better houses, as a shabby man sometimes gets squeezed in amongst a crowd of well-dressed people. The brother was generally spoken of by Miss Banks' admirers as 'terribly afflicted,' as a 'sad trial,' as a 'poor useless creature,' as an 'awful burden,' as a 'fearful charge;' and every one who spoke on the subject—and a great many did speak about it every day—said 'Miss Banks' conduct

was beautiful,' that her devotion was 'beyond praise.'

Now the facts were, first, that the house belonged to the poor 'useless creature;' second, that he had a comfortable pension coming in, which helped to keep things going; third, that Miss Banks had not a halfpenny in the world of her own—nothing except what she could in a ladylike way gain by the exercise of her wits; and fourth, that she did not attend to the sick man at all. There was a man, a soldier, who had been servant to Mr. Gayford's father when that gentleman was in the army; and this servant now waited upon the invalid, and acted besides as, to quote Miss Banks' own phrase, 'male parlour-maid' in the tiny household. This man was nurse, companion, secretary to the 'fearful charge.' He accompanied him when he went out in his bath-chair; he read the newspaper aloud each morning; he brought him up his meals; he tucked him into bed; and he slept in the same room on a mattress laid generally on the floor, so that he might be close at hand if wanted.

'I always feel easy when I leave him with Niel,' Miss Banks was in the habit of remarking to her

friends; and if this were so she could never have felt otherwise than easy, since Mr. Gayford was always left with Niel, and with no other person.

For the rest, when, immediately after her sister's death, Mr. Gayford was attacked by the disease which ultimately reduced him to the state of a living nonentity, Miss Banks had, with her usual 'admirable sense,' put the case before him in the clearest manner.

'If I am to go on living here,' she said—she had resided under his roof ever since his marriage—' and look after your household and your health, I must be sure of the ground I am standing on. I can't be left a pauper in my old age. You are able to make a will now. The doctors say plainly they cannot tell how long that may be the case. You have very little besides your pension and this house; but leave that little and the house to me, and I will do the best I can for you and myself.'

So said, so done; the will made, signed, witnessed, locked up with other papers in a box at the office of Mr. Gayford's solicitors, Miss Banks continued to live in the house where she had resided for

many years, and which, for all she ever told the world about the matter, might have been her own.

Never had a lady better cause for trying to keep a relative alive, and therefore the invalid was well cared for, well nourished, well doctored, well looked after. If he had been poor he might have been taken to the nearest hospital or the workhouse, or his grave, for all Miss Banks' protestations of interest and affection; but as matters stood she knew too well on which side her bread was buttered to run any risks about dropping it, and accordingly Mr. Gayford had his two rooms set apart on the ground floor; Niel, who received a good salary to wait upon him; a clever cook, who had her orders to be most particular in the treatment of such delicacies as the invalid fancied; a doctor, who came to see him as regularly as if he had been old Lady Griffin in Kensington-square, who was always fancying herself dying, but who really promised to outlive all her expectant heirs.

And further, he had Miss Banks, who ran in and out, and told him the gossip of the neighbourhood and saw other people did their duty by him, keeping

a watchful eye even upon the proceedings of the priceless Niel.

The doctor praised her 'devotion;' the clergyman could not sufficiently extol her 'self-denial;' the world—her world—professed itself unable to speak in terms sufficiently high of her 'courage and constancy.'

People said they could not imagine how she got through all she did; and it really was wonderful; for, with an eye always open to the main chance, Miss Banks had seen long ago it would be profitable to allow friends to come and stay in the house occasionally; and consequently as a rule some person was stopping there—some bird of passage, who, just alighting to rest in Kensington, went on pleased and refreshed, entertaining a higher opinion than ever of that 'wonderful woman.'

Her connection was inexhaustible; her relations, according to her own account, as 'the sand on the seashore.' Officers from China, languid ladies just returned from India, poor dear Selina on her way to the south of France, Jessie packed off from home all in a hurry on account of her terrible infatuation for

the handsome organist,—the little house at Kensington was big enough to receive them all, and Miss Banks willing to receive the 'acknowledgment,' sometimes large, sometimes but moderate, which was always offered and always accepted.

'If I were better off or had only myself, you know, dear, I wouldn't take a penny,' Miss Banks was wont to declare, with an air of proud humility that in itself was quite touching.

'Poor darling, we know how you are placed,' would be the sympathetic answer if the relative chanced to be a lady. 'I am sure we often say, we cannot think how you continue to keep up and look so cheerful as you do;' while men would reply in fewer words perhaps, but with some additional gift pressed upon the sorely-tried spinster.

It was this lady who chanced to be what the Scotch call the 'first foot' across the threshold of Holyrood House when once the Moffats were fairly domiciled in Palace Gardens.

The butler, in an interval of elegant leisure, thinking he would draw the dining-room blinds up a little higher, happened to be engaged in that not demean-

ing occupation when he beheld a carriage and pair stop at the gate; out of which, before the footman could get down, popped an active middle-sized lady wearing short petticoats, and making in her descent an unaffected display of trim boots and trim ankles. The carriage drove on, and the lady came up the drive. Very plainly dressed, possessed of no imposing presence, if it had not been for the carriage Sir John's butler might have hesitated ere confessing that Lady Moffat was at home; but taking that vision of respectability into consideration, he admitted the fact of her ladyship's being within, adding, however, as a saving clause, he thought she was engaged.

Miss Banks had gone through so many ordeals of a similar nature, that, seated in the library, where he carefully shut her in, she felt she could await the result with equanimity. Lady Moffat would see her, she felt sure, and she was right.

'Will you walk this way, please?' said that 'nice superior butler,' as she spoke of him afterwards. 'Her ladyship is in the boudoir.'

It would not be too much to say that when Miss

Banks entered that apartment her eyes absolutely winked with the glare, and her teeth chattered in her head as though she had come down suddenly upon a glacier.

It was a cold, cheerless, icy afternoon in February, and a bright fire burnt in the grate; but not all the fires that ever were kindled—so Miss Banks declared to Mrs. Cresson in Edwardes-square—could have made her ladyship's boudoir look warm.

A chilly-looking carpet, chilly-looking curtains, armchairs upholstered in the lightest of cretonnes, a white fur hearthrug, mirrors everywhere, starved plants in great china vases, not a picture on the walls, not a book out of place on the tables, no litter of music on the piano, no work of any sort to be seen; even before the door was closed behind her Miss Banks had mastered these details, and stood surprised at the appearance of the lady she had come to see.

A woman not in the very faintest degree resembling any one Miss Banks had ever seen before in all her life; a woman utterly distinct from every variety of the newly rich she had previously seen; a woman

possessed of imperial beauty; in middle age more striking looking, more remarkable in appearance, more to be remembered with every accessory of wealth and well-being and assured station about her than when the man, whose life since he first saw her had been a long sorrow, beheld her in the morning twilight, standing in the little garden before the poor mean house that stood, and for aught he knew still stood, in the road leading due east out of London.

'Delighted to find you have come down into our neighbourhood, Lady Moffat,' began Miss Banks, when, the first civilities having been exchanged, she found herself seated before an immense fire, with leisure and liberty to lay her first parallels. 'You have never heard of me, I daresay; but I have heard a great deal about you from our mutual friends the Morlings.'

'I do not know very much of them,' said her ladyship, pleased nevertheless; for the Morlings were good people and to be desired, and she had wished to be intimate with them, only something always came in the way; that something really

being that the Morlings thought Lady Moffat a detestable person, and said so.

They had made the remark, amongst others, to Miss Banks; but it answered its purpose as well in the hand of that clever lady as the most cordial praise could have done.

'Really? They spoke as if they knew you well; and so the moment I heard you were actually settled here, I asked dear Lady Griffin to drop me at your gate, as I felt I must just run in and bid you welcome. I am terribly tied at home with a poor hopeless invalid; but I trust to see you frequently. As an old resident I of course know everybody. And, O, dear, the changes I have seen even in my time! This very house! Do you know, I feel it like a dream to be sitting here! The last time I ever saw poor dear Mrs. Seaton she was in the very spot where you are now, and she was talking to me about their projected tour on the Continent.'

'O, did you know Mrs. Seaton?' broke in a young voice—the voice of a girl who had been curtly introduced to Miss Banks as 'My daughter.'

'Know her? Yes, indeed I did, my dear,' said Miss Banks, turning with a sense of relief from her hostess; 'a most charming creature. Ah, a terrible story. Enough to touch the hardest heart, what I have witnessed here! It is a place full of painful memories to me, yet I love it too. I assure you, Lady Moffat, it seemed to me quite like old times to be coming up to the familiar door again.'

Whatever Lady Moffat's other gifts might be, she had not that of conversation. Subsequently Miss Banks declared she was 'too earnest' to condescend to the 'trifles' other women delighted in; and it was upon the whole rather a relief to both when Rachel, coming a little forward, took part in the talk. She was so fresh; she 'wanted to know' so many things; the Palace was so full of interest to her, she had just been reading up all about it. She was so deeply interested in every detail about old times, or indeed times that were not very old.

'Anything which is in the past, not in the present,' interpolated Lady Moffat.

Miss Banks feared she knew very little except about the present.

'When people get on in life,' she explained, for the benefit of all whom it might concern, 'they find so much to think of and to do that they forget all old things, just as they lay aside old garments.'

'I think it is a very good plan,' said Lady Moffat.

'As you have been living here a long time, though,' continued the girl, 'perhaps you can tell me whether the chair the Duke of Sussex had "curtained round and covered from the air," so that he might "read and think at ease," is—'

Miss Banks shook her head; she had never even heard of it.

'Then I suppose you do not know either if the seat good Queen Caroline had placed on a mount in the Gardens is in the same place where she used to sit sheltered from the wind?'

'Good gracious, no, my dear!' cried Miss Banks, laughing. 'I daresay it was chopped up for firewood long ago.'

'You talk too much, Rachel,' interposed Lady Moffat. 'You are wearying Miss Banks.'

Miss Banks had heard a good deal in the years

of her pilgrimage; but she had never heard such a rebuke given to a girl out of her teens in the presence of a total stranger, a rebuke which, sharp though the words were that conveyed it, seemed as nothing in comparison to the tone in which Lady Moffat uttered them.

For a second she remained silent, absolutely confounded; but then she said, addressing both mother and daughter,

'I shall have to rub up my history, I see. We must go through the place together some day, and we will try and find out about everything you want to know.'

'You had better be careful what you promise,' answered Lady Moffat; 'twelve months would not suffice to do that.'

But the girl did not make any reply. She smiled a little painfully, and sat without speaking, the brilliant colour which had mounted to her face fading away slowly, and a look of sad gravity settling down upon her features.

'A lovely young thing,' thought Miss Banks, as shortly afterwards she walked homewards, more

slowly and meditatively than was her wont; 'with "forget-me-not" eyes and hair that looks as if sunbeams were always resting upon it. Not a bit like her mother.'

All the better for her, if Miss Banks had but known it—all the better by far!

'You need not sit sulking,' was the mother's amiable remark to her daughter, when Miss Banks had fairly departed. 'If you must talk, why can't you talk like other girls? I declare I often feel ashamed to hear you. Who cares for all that old rubbish about people who are dead and gone except yourself? As you are so fond of kings and queens, why don't you show a little interest in what is going on at Court nowadays? If you did, you might get your papa to have you presented.'

'I am sorry to have vexed you, mamma,' said the girl, ignoring the latter part of this remarkable sentence.

'Sorry to have vexed you, mamma,' repeated Lady Moffat, with an attempt at mimicry which was too angry to be successful. 'You must speak in a different manner before you will make me believe

that. If you can't look and talk differently, you had better go to your own room. I won't have any of your tempers shown to me.'

Her daughter rose, without haste or hesitation, but with an inexpressible grace and sweetness pervading every action.

'Do you really wish me to leave you, mamma?' she asked.

'Do I really wish I had never seen you?' retorted Lady Moffat. 'Better ask me that at once, and you will get the same answer. Yes, yes, yes! I wish you had never been born, never been reared, never grown up! Now are you satisfied?'

The girl did not answer; she only winced as if she had received a blow, and walked straight to the door without once looking at her mother with those eyes which always seemed to Lady Moffat to hold in their deep pure depths a reproach and a warning. For Rachel's eyes were exactly those of the man who, losing everything for love, found, when it was too late, he had never been beloved.

Across the great hall, up the wide staircase, the girl went slowly; she met no one by the way. Like

her own heart, the house seemed strangely lonely. She made her way to the very top landing, and entered the room she had asked for.

When she preferred her petition she scarcely thought she should ever look on Kensington Gardens with the sorrowful forebodings her heart held now. Beside one of the windows was an easy-chair; she sat down in it, and looked at the cold wintry landscape wearily, mournfully, as others before her had done, as others in the time to come must do.

She did not love her mother—it would have been folly to suppose such a thing possible; for she could never remember the time when her mother kissed and fondled her, when she comforted her infant troubles and soothed her childish griefs; but she fretted at the estrangement between them, the commencement of which was beyond her memory, and which she felt was growing wider day by day.

We yearn for love as naturally as we cling to life; and it was appalling to this lonely little soul to know for certain that, let her do what she would, she could never win affection where she had a right most to expect it.

'Why does mamma hate me so?' was a question she once, when she was little, put pitifully to her father; and Mr. Moffat—as he was then—answered,

'You must not talk so foolishly, dear; your mamma could not possibly do anything so wicked.'

But she knew now for certain her mamma did hate her really, 'would be glad perhaps if I were to die,' she thought with a shudder. 'I wonder why it is?' she went on, looking out on the strip of green which lies between the houses in Palace Gardens and the yews and thorns in Kensington. 'It cannot be anything I do now, because it has always been the same; besides, she dislikes papa nearly as much. I know that quite well. Poor papa!'

She sat for a long time beside the window, letting her eyes wander over the strange prospect beyond, as her thoughts likewise wandered to and fro, now thinking of the mystery she could not solve, again picturing the men and women who had walked through the park beyond, busy with plots and intrigues and cares and joys and hopes and fears, and how little history ever knew or could tell about their inner lives.

'Rachel.'

It was her mother's voice which broke in upon her reverie.

'Yes, mamma,' and she started up obediently.

'Don't let Sir John'—Lady Moffat was so proud of the title, she often used that form of speech when it sounded not merely unnecessary, but absurd—'don't let Sir John find you moping here when he comes home. You know what he is when he finds you have been put out.'

'I will dress and come down-stairs, mamma,' answered the girl, with sweet docility.

For a minute after her mother's departure she stood looking round the room his love had furnished for her with every comfort he could think of and procure. That the one large apartment might be left intact, a door of communication was made with a bedchamber adjoining, both commanding that view over Kensington Gardens which first attracted her fancy.

Everything the room contained was simple, yet rich; all her little fancies had been considered, all her tastes considered. Often it seemed to her a

very haven of rest when the waters of domestic life grew rough and storm-tossed. Disguise it as she might try to do even from herself, matters had grown much worse; life seemed more trying in Palace Gardens than had ever been the case hitherto.

The grander they became, the more money they spent, the larger the establishment they maintained, the more intolerable grew Lady Moffat's temper. Man could not depend upon it nor woman neither. She might be calm as a glassy lake one moment, and the next furious with passion. It was an absolute impossibility to know how to avert these attacks; they were due to no apparent cause: the merest trifle, often, indeed, nothing at all, would induce an absolute paroxysm of rage.

The only thing which ever seemed to excuse the smallest restraining influence was a curious and apparently unreasoning dread of her husband. She would stop sometimes in the very middle of a sentence as if she were shot. There were times when a mere look from Sir John was able to stay the words on her lips; but on all these occasions the

expression her face assumed was rather that of fear caused by some memory which her husband's glance recalled, than of dread of his reproaches.

Rachel had seen the expression often, and wondered at it. She thought of it now as she stood in the gray cold twilight, thinking of the man's kindness and patience and generosity and forbearance, which met with so ungrateful a return.

'Such a miserable home,' she murmured; 'and we might all be so happy! Poor papa! O, poor, poor papa!'

Poor papa indeed! Spite of his wealth and his house envied by so many, and his title envied by many more, and the respect in which he was held, poor, poor papa!

CHAPTER IV.

MISS BANKS' TACTICS.

It is not to be supposed that the Moffats could long inhabit their new mansion without the necessity arising for them to give a ball. Holyrood House was so manifestly a place not so much to live as to receive guests in, that, as Miss Banks truly said, there was only one thing to be done with the rooms, 'Fill them with company.'

Miss Banks' progress into intimacy had proceeded at express speed. She was always in and out; always busy in 'dear Lady Moffat's interest;' always introducing a fresh acquaintance, or heralding the approach of one. She did this good thing, however, which probably no person save herself could have managed. She toned down the glare which frightened the new order of visitor that entered Lady Moffat's boudoir and drawing-room.

Sir John and his wife had disagreed at the out-

set upon many of the decorations her ladyship was determined to patronise, and when paperhanger and gilder and upholsterer had amongst them accomplished a fearful work, he ventured to declare in so many words,

'I cannot say I like the result; but if you do, I am satisfied.'

A remark open to doubt on the score of prudence perhaps, but not altogether unpardonable, one would have thought, considering he had to pay for embellishments he certainly regarded as mistakes.

Lady Moffat, however, was of a different opinion. She regarded the words as a gauntlet thrown down, and lost no time in picking it up.

A very terrible quarter of an hour ensued, during the course of which Sir John said nothing, and she said a great deal.

'You admire that dingy dining-room, I suppose,' she finished, 'which is enough to give one the horrors! The idea of eating one's meals in such a gloomy dungeon! Egyptian style you call it, don't you? I could find another name which, I think, would be more appropriate.'

Then Sir John spoke.

'I do not fancy you could,' he retorted. 'Egyptian is the best style for a dining-room where there is always a skeleton at the board;' and he walked away and left her before she quite gathered his meaning.

'A skeleton!' she repeated; and the mirrors and the white enamel and the gilt mouldings and the cold, cold hangings faded from before her eyes, and there rose in their stead a phantom her husband's phrase had conjured up, and that came and stood with pitiless eyes and mocking smile before her.

Was it not Gerald Griffin—he who retired so young from the world into a monastery, and from a monastery, still young, into the grave—that told in mournful numbers how, when everything about and around seemed brightest and gayest,

'I pause, for the footfall of Fate in mine ear'?

It was just thus Lady Moffat paused occasionally in her craziest moments, in the midst of her wildest ebullitions of temper, as though she heard the coming of Nemesis.

She had no reason to think she was pursued, no

cause to believe any step was hurrying after to overtake her own; but she knew she had done that which people believe must surely work its own punishment; and there were times when a panic seized her that some day everything might come out, and the finger of scorn be pointed at her for the ruin she had wrought, the trust she had betrayed.

'If Miss Banks ever suspected!' she thought; for that good lady, though excessively liberal in her practice, was naturally strait-laced in her theory, and waxed very severe when she heard of any frail beauty's sins being condoned, of any escapade being forgiven.

'We are not half strict enough, we are not indeed!' she said to Lady Moffat; and Lady Moffat agreed with her, and answered,

'No, we are not.'

'A hard-and-fast line ought to be drawn,' proceeded the spinster. 'What is the use of talking to young people about virtue if we show them we are willing to receive vice?'

Lady Moffat highly approved Miss Banks' sen-

timents, and thought, moreover, 'we' were all very inconsistent; upon which subject she happened to be a better authority than her visitor was aware.

But if Miss Banks had known the whole story she would have 'proved loyal' to her new friend.

No fear of her deserting the occupants of Holyrood House while there was a shot in the locker or a bottle of wine in the cellar. A lady turned naked out of the Divorce Court, without a single rag of worldly prosperity left to cover her, was one person; a lady, no matter how naughty she might have been, who dressed well, and lived in a fine house, and could go and ask her husband for money, and who 'need want for nothing,' quite another.

If you think of it, reader, the same rule holds good with regard to the other sex as well.

'No one's enemy but his own' is left out in the streets, and bid 'move on' from great men's doors; while the successful rogue, clothed in purple and fine linen, is petted and courted and fawned upon.

His gilded sins are not flagrant as those of the much-besmirched wretch, who has not money enough to buy himself a dinner or pay the price of a bed.

A lame dog in the gutter and a lame dog in his lordship's kennels are two quite different specimens of canine nature. The one is drowned, the other cared for. What would you? So goes the world. If you do not like its pleasant cordial ways and confiding heart, you had better keep out of it, taking care never to want anything from its good offices; for the world is as bad as a woman—and never forgives the man who does not admire it.

Miss Banks admired Lady Moffat, or, at least, said she did, intensely. She had never seen any one, she declared, she considered so handsome and so original, so fitted to grace the society in which she moved, and yet so perfectly simple and refreshingly natural.

Lady Moffat seemed to her 'a poem.' Never in the pages of any three-volume novel had she met with so interesting a psychological study. She was as unlike every other person in mind as in appearance. Miss Banks professed herself as yet unable to sound the depths of such a nature; but hoped, as time went on, she might come to understand Lady Moffat as perfectly as she appreciated her even now.

Plenty of opportunities were afforded to Miss Banks for the prosecution of her studies. She was always at Holyrood House; she had constituted herself Lady Moffat's friend, philosopher, and guide; and it was wonderful the docility with which her somewhat impracticable ladyship submitted herself to this control.

Miss Banks compassed her ends by flattery, not open and barefaced so much as implied. In this art she was an adept. In years of practice she had learnt every mystery of the craft—how to flatter, when to flatter, whom to flatter. Truth to tell, she scarcely ever found a person who objected to the pleasant deception, or who proved an exception to her rule—that if properly done it is safe to flatter every one.

As some men make love by looks, which are safer by far than the damning medium of pen-and-ink, so Miss Banks had a way of implying flattery that succeeded in compassing its object much better than barefaced praise. Not that her very admiration, merely indicated though it might be, was not barefaced enough; but people never found out what an

insult it had all been to their understandings till, by the light of subsequent events, they read the whole story of the imposition from beginning to end.

A past master, then, in the art of making good her footing in a desirable house, Miss Banks devoted much time and much trouble to the work of cultivating Lady Moffat. She did more—she tried to mould her; tried to soften down those asperities which stood in the way of complete social success; strove to teach the alphabet in use amongst the quite new set her own energy, and Sir John's character for generous philanthropy, had gathered around Holyrood House.

If she had been working for herself (but then, indeed, she was doing that), Miss Banks declared subsequently, she could not have done more than she did for Lady Moffat.

'I made her,' she declared at a later period. 'She could not have made her way, she could never have kept it, if it had not been for me. People in a decent rank of life never would have tolerated her *gaucheries;* not even Sir John's money and Sir John's quiet hypocrisy could have kept them from

social shipwreck at their very first start if I had not taken the helm.'

There was truth in this; more truth than in most of the statements Miss Banks generally made. It required the nicest tact to steer Lady Moffat among the rocks and over the quicksands of this strange ocean, amongst the thousand little dangers which unaccustomed mariners must encounter when they venture into a society which has unspoken rules of its own, and unwritten codes of language and manner and thought, as unintelligible to people who have simply wealth, as the language, manners, and thoughts of merely rich folks are to those who have been reared from childhood in a different rank.

At a very early period of their acquaintance Miss Banks made two discoveries: viz. that whilst the devil himself could not have driven Lady Moffat, neither a child nor any one else could lead her. She would not be guided or coerced.

'She has the nature of the lowest type of criminal,' considered Miss Banks, with rare discrimination. 'It was well for her she happened to

meet with a rich husband, or she would now be who can say where ?'

And this was actually the case. Sir John had long before found he could do nothing with her. Anger could not tame, love failed to soften her. There was just that want in her character, that lack in her composition, Doctor Dilton had felt long before when he watched that evil light kindling in her eyes, and heard the hard unfeeling tone in which she spoke of an illness which aroused the sympathy and evoked the pity of total strangers.

Miss Banks was a clever woman; but even she found that Lady Moffat taxed all her resources. She could understand a rogue, perhaps from a kindred feeling; she could comprehend a fool, because she came into contact with fools every day of her life. She could moreover hazard an idea how to deal with a fiend, because she knew even the most dangerous temper generally has a vulnerable point where it can be attacked; but the combination of these three qualities, and many more beside, in one woman, and that woman gifted moreover with everything which might have made life desirable and

good—health, beauty, wealth, a most admirable husband, children who did their best to please her, children straight, strong-limbed, sound in mind and body—was a phenomenon she had never yet met with.

'If I try to drive her, she will turn and rend me,' thought Miss Banks (it was the very necessity of her occupation that she should not indulge in the pleasurable weakness of a confidante, and herself had generally to discourse with herself upon all topics of engrossing interest); 'and if I show I am guiding her she will laugh that evil laugh which I detest, and walk straight away out of leading-strings.'

A difficult position, and yet Miss Banks proved equal to it. In three months—ay, in two—Lady Moffat found she could do nothing without her. She took Miss Banks when she went shopping; she liked to have her company when she resorted to places of amusement; she was an immense assistance when guests assembled at Holyrood House; and, in fact, if Miss Banks could have left her 'poor dear invalid,' and chosen to run the risk of being, at any instant, bundled out of doors, she might have taken up her

abode in Palace Gardens, and found herself installed as chief adviser to Sir John Moffat's amiable wife.

'You have got a little corner up there,' she said one day, pointing to a most obscure portion of the icy cold-looking boudoir, 'where I think you might manage to place a small bargain that would suit you. A poor dear creature I know has to part with her china; such china! been in the family for a hundred and fifty years; the loveliest china; it is just perfection. I wish I could afford to take it at the price she would be glad to receive; for I could make money out of it. If you like china—but perhaps you don't, I have not much fancy for it myself, though I am afraid to say so to some people, because it happens to be now all the fashion—you will never meet with such a chance again.'

Lady Moffat thought she did not care much about china; but she said so in a tone which showed Miss Banks she had risen to the bait.

'Well, it certainly seems to me a craze,' went on her friend. 'Still, if you have time, I do wish you would come and see her little collection. It is far finer china than that Lady Griffin makes such a fuss

over; far finer and rarer. Do you think Sir John would like to have a look at it? But I forgot; of course he has no taste for nicknacks.'

'There would be no harm in looking at the things,' conceded Lady Moffat.

'Not if you would not mind the trouble. And my friend, poor dear, is really delightful; she has long given up society—had not the means to receive any but just a few of her old intimates; and now she has lost a portion even of what she had, and these little cherished possessions that she prized beyond measure must go. She cried when she spoke to me about them, and I declare I almost felt inclined to cry myself. So I had to put on a very gruff and unfeeling manner, and say, "That is all nonsense, my dear; when you have gone through so much dreadful trouble and shed such bitter tears about important matters, surely you are not going to break your heart over a few trumpery cups and saucers."'

Broken hearts were matters quite out of Lady Moffat's line; but cups and saucers were different.

It was not long ere she thought she would like a little china, if very good indeed; then she bought it;

then she brought it home herself in her own carriage; sent for a cabinet-maker, and had shelves fitted up for its reception.

'And all I can say is, my lady, if I may make so bold, that more beautiful china there is not at South Kensington,' ventured the tradesman.

'It is very good,' said Lady Moffat, as if she were a judge.

Fortune favours the bold; and Fortune played a card into Miss Banks' hand over that initiatory game of clothing the bare walls that she never could have expected.

Not a week after the little obscure corner was what Miss Banks mentally called 'made decent,' a gentleman happened to dine with Sir John who was rich enough to have, in City parlance, bought the house and everything it contained, and Sir John and everything he owned, five times over.

A person disgustingly rich, uselessly rich, wickedly rich, outsiders who had not a sixpence to bless themselves with affirmed.

He was an enthusiast upon the subject of china: an old cracked bowl, even a bit of a plate, sufficed to

send him into ecstasies. In business careful about small things, wise over pennies, particular as to the most trifling outlay, once he left his office he became a wild spendthrift; scattering his thousands and throwing away hundreds, bidding for pictures, searching for coins, hunting about for china.

He was not in the drawing-room two minutes after dinner before he began investigating for hidden treasures. He did not care for mirrors, or gilding, or white enamel, or soft luxurious carpets, or the newest ideas in chandeliers. Engravings, unless they were old, had no interest for him; the works of art in splendid bindings, that occupied prominent places of honour in Lady Moffat's rooms, he simply opened and closed. If he had not been too polite to say 'Pish!' he would have uttered that depreciatory exclamation.

Wandering into the boudoir, however, to have a closer look at the elder daughter of the house, who struck him as a very pleasant work of nature, he happened while speaking to her about the 'colour' of some music she was playing, a phrase which seemed perfectly unintelligible to the primitive little soul, to

catch sight of the new purchase. In a moment he was beside it; in another instant his careful hands held a saucer, and his lips were uttering delighted ejaculations of, 'Ay! ay! ay! ay! this is something like! this is exquisite! My dear Sir John, how I grudge you this possession! Heirlooms, I suppose —been in the family, no doubt, for ages!'

Sir John smiled quietly, and answered, stroking the hand Rachel had laid on his the while,

'Quite the contrary; my wife picked them up a bargain the other day.'

The connoisseur turned, with the saucer still in his hand.

'Now stop!' he said. 'Lady Moffat, before I hear what you gave for them, I will write you a cheque for double the amount. These are things I have been looking after for years; they are almost priceless, in fact, because they are not now to be had for love or money.'

Lady Moffat was very sorry; but neither love nor money could buy them. She had got them quite by chance, and she meant to keep them; but she said all this graciously enough. She felt pleased and

flattered; and when she told the price she had paid, and the rich man declared it was nothing, simply preposterous, and offered to quadruple it, she felt more pleased still.

Through her own cleverness she thought she had secured the prize; and when she repeated the conversation to Miss Banks she totally ignored the trifling share that lady had chanced to have in the transaction. Miss Banks had her innings, however. Having ascertained the name of this wonderful millionaire, she privately got hold of him, and put many a bargain in his way, which he, unlike Lady Moffat, acknowledged, not merely with thanks, but in a substantial and gentlemanly manner. She bound him over to secrecy concerning her part in these matters, and he entered into the pact heart and soul.

'Of course I am devoted to dear Lady Moffat, and I would do anything in the world I could to please her,' explained the astute lady; 'but I am so burdened, so awkwardly placed, and one must live, you know.'

'It is a pity you should ever die, Miss Banks,' he answered gallantly. 'You really are the most

wonderful woman I ever had the pleasure of meeting.'

From this example it will be seen how Miss Banks made her way into the very heart of the Moffat citadel—improved its mistress and what she called humanised her rooms.

More china was in due time discovered, on this occasion of a style which met with universal admiration; other corners were filled up, pictures were hung on the walls, curiously carved boxes and ornaments were to be found on the tables, flowers were grouped into masses, curtains were introduced to 'keep out draughts' that toned down the glare to something endurable.

'Now if I could get those mirrors out of the panels of the doors, I should be comparatively happy,' thought Miss Banks; but it was of no use going too fast. She felt Lady Moffat's cattle were of a description that refused to be hurried. If they were hurried, they refused to go at all.

'If the ball turns out a success, I expect I shall be able to effect wonders,' said Miss Banks to her faithful confidante.

What she had already endured on the subject of the intended ball, no words can describe.

First mooted as a mere house-warming business, Miss Banks' suggestion, that it should serve not merely as a remembrance of old friends, but as recognition of new, found favour in the sight of Lady Moffat.

'Make it a really grand affair,' advised Miss Banks; 'have something that can be talked about, and to which an invitation will be considered an honour. You have a magnificent house magnificently furnished, *carte blanche* as to money, a husband who is—shall we say?—reasonable, and *yourself*— Now with these materials not to give such a ball as has never been heard of in Palace Gardens before would be a sin, positively a sin. Think the notion over, and fill out my meagre idea as you only can; and if you believe I can help you at all, be of the very slightest assistance, tell me how, and you know you may command me.'

CHAPTER V.

SIR JOHN CONSIDERS.

'I DON'T know what we should have done without Miss Banks.'

It was Lady Moffat who made this complimentary remark, and it was Sir John who received it in silence.

He knew what he should have done without Miss Banks; *he* wished he had never seen her face: but years had taught him how much better silence was on his part than any amount of valour, and he remained judiciously dumb.

'She certainly is the very most useful person I ever met,' went on Lady Moffat, blandly patronising. 'She seems to have everything at her fingers' ends, and she knows everybody.'

'She has undoubtedly an exceptionally large number of acquaintances,' said Sir John, glad to

find a point where he could conscientiously acquiesce in his wife's opinion.

'You know, my dear, she has really devoted herself to our interests in this matter.'

'So you have told me, Mira,' answered Sir John cautiously.

What could be going to happen when her ladyship addressed him as 'my dear'? What was she going to ask him? What, in a word, did she want? Time had taught this man suspicion as well as prudence. It was so rare a thing for Lady Moffat to be ordinarily civil, that he might well be pardoned the doubt that such an amazing result could only be produced by some extraordinary cause.

But Lady Moffat wanted nothing for herself. It would, indeed, have been strange if she had; for hitherto Sir John had provided her with such things as she needed, and permitted her besides to have almost unlimited power over his purse. She had but to ask, and have; but to desire, and her wish was gratified. Since her second marriage she had never known shortness of money. Sir John's liber-

ality, if judicious, had been great, and so far the question of extravagance or of expense had never been raised between the ill-assorted pair. For these reasons, and for others, Lady Moffat wanted nothing for herself; but she thought it might be desirable if Sir John gave a present to some one else.

Still bearing this in mind, she continued:

'I have been thinking that, as she has done so much for us—given up her whole time, in fact, and employed extra help for that wretched creature, whose life must be a complete burden to himself and everybody connected with him, so that she could give herself up completely to helping me about such details as I could not possibly see after myself—you might like to make her some little present—a brooch, or a locket, or a ring, or—or anything of that sort. She is such a grateful homely kind of body, so thankful for kindness, thinks so much of the merest trifles. She showed me a trumpery chain some friend gave her a dozen years ago—not worth half a crown, I should say—and she told me with tears in her eyes she valued it far more than if it were pearls. "It is not the worth of the gift

which makes it precious," she said; "but it is the way it is given, and the person who gives it."'

Sir John sat looking at his wife in a stupor of astonishment. To hear her lisping the pleasant falsehoods current in good society, retailing the genial humbug dealt in wholesale by Miss Banks and others such as she, was fifty times more astounding than it must have sounded to hear Falstaff 'babbling of green fields' instead of sack.

What was coming? what incredible transformation was about to be wrought? Had the atmosphere of Palace Gardens performed a miracle? was the association with charming Miss Banks really going to change the spots in this leopard, to wash the skin of this Ethiop white?

'If you consider such an attention necessary and likely to prove acceptable—' he began slowly, and with a natural hesitation; for though the proposal seemed to him marvellous, he did not wish by any ill-advised opposition to throw cold water on so unselfish a suggestion as that made by his wife.

'I do, I do!' she eagerly interrupted. 'And you will buy her something?'

'I was going to say,' continued Sir John—like all slow thinkers he possessed the enormous advantage of remembering what he had thought—'that, if you are sure of not giving offence by offering Miss Banks a present—we are almost total strangers to her, remember, at best only acquaintances of yesterday—the gift would come with a better grace from you. I would do anything in my power to please you, Mira, as you know; but I feel I really could not ask a lady to accept jewelry, or—or anything indeed of that kind from me.'

'What do you say to a dress, then?' suggested Lady Moffat. 'Colonel Lancelough—Lady Griffin's nephew—brought her home a shawl from India; and when she was telling me about it she laughed, and said she should not be able to wear it till she could save enough out of "candle-ends" to buy a thick handsome silk.'

Sir John looked grave; he did not understand this sort of thing in the very least. He could comprehend people being very poor and requiring help—honest, honourable, worthy people, who, having had a quarrel with Fortune, had got the worst of it;

who, having tried their fiercest to succeed, had only compassed failure: but Miss Banks and the class of whom she was only a representative perplexed him.

'No matter how hardly the world had gone with me,' thought this unsophisticated gentleman, 'I do not think I should like any one to offer me a suit of clothes.' And for analogous reasons the silk dress found even less favour in his eyes than the brooch had done.

Ah, he did not know Miss Banks. If he had offered to send her in a ton of coals she would have taken that ton, and many more if he liked to pay for them, in a grateful and humble spirit. She often said,

'Any one can give; but there are few able to receive gracefully.' She could; she could receive anything, and say 'Thank you' for it. Nobody need have feared hurting her pride. As she frequently remarked, 'Thank goodness, I have not any!'

Well, well, we are told pride is a sin; but surely there must be a sort of pride that is a mere protection against degradation when it keeps people from the dirty water Miss Banks breasted like a duck:

filthy slimy water, after touching which nor man nor woman could feel clean.

'I do not think either of us could offer her a dress,' Sir John said mildly. 'An Indian shawl is one thing, and so many yards of silk quite another.'

'O, just what you like,' answered Lady Moffat, with a toss of her head familiarity had long since told him was ominous.

'Just what *you* like, Mira,' he hastened to reply. 'It must be your present; I dare not take such a liberty. Tell me what you think she would fancy, and I will buy it for you; or you can get it yourself and have the bill sent in to me.'

He was 'reasonable,' as Miss Banks remarked. God knew if all his money could have purchased him peace at home, or ease of mind anywhere, he would freely have relinquished it, and begun the world again with a light heart.

A few pounds! He thought no more of giving them than many a man possessed of twice his wealth would of parting with as many shillings. He was not lavish or extravagant—simply liberal; and though he did not see the slightest necessity for the

gift suggested, still, if it pleased Lady Moffat to bestow such a token, he felt more than satisfied for her to do so.

With, for her, an almost warm manner, his wife thanked him for his compliance, and begged he would select some plain and useful ornament likely to prove acceptable to so staid and matter-of-fact a lady as Miss Banks.

'Something she can wear every day,' suggested Lady Moffat, perfectly unconscious she was merely repeating Miss Banks' own words.

There are many articles a lady can wear every day; and this lady had not intended her hint to be construed so literally as to necessitate the gift being of small value.

Sir John, however, in the innocence of his heart, bought what he considered a suitable present—not a cheap one either—which Miss Banks, in the solitude of her own chamber, pronounced 'a bit of trumpery.'

She knew all about the matter of course. Knew exactly what Lady Moffat had said and her husband answered; knew Sir John would no more have

thought of asking her to accept a brooch (it was a brooch) than he would have thought of flying to the moon; but, despite all this, she sat down and wrote him a pretty little note, full of thanks and regards and astonishment and deceit and hypocrisy generally.

Sir John was amazed. The note went to his office, a place where probably a woman's note, save on the plainest business, had never been delivered before; and he had to read the neatly-turned sentences twice over before he could make sure he quite grasped Miss Banks' meaning.

Then, however, he took pen and paper, and replied. If he did not comprehend Miss Banks' manœuvres, at all events he felt there was something he did not like in this persistent attack upon himself. If his reason was at fault, his instinct was not; and he therefore wrote instantly, disclaiming all merit in the matter, and explaining that the gift, such as it was, originated solely in Lady Moffat's desire to present Miss Banks with some slight token of regard.

'Difficult,' decided Miss Banks. 'Some City

men are at first; but just let me get a ring in his nose, and then—'

Then it would be a bad time for that worthy knight's pocket, or Miss Banks meant to know the reason why.

On the evening of that same day Sir John, strolling through Kensington Gardens with Rachel, asked casually,

'Do you like Miss Banks, dear?'

'She is very pleasant, papa,' answered the girl, a little surprised at the question.

'But do you like her?' he repeated, in the mild earnest tone which had become habitual.

'I have never thought about it,' said Rachel; 'yes, I suppose I do.'

'Your attachment for her is not, however, enthusiastic, apparently,' suggested Sir John.

'No; but mamma's is,' laughed the girl. 'I have never known her take such a fancy to any one before. It makes the house quite pleasant.'

'That is something in her favour, at any rate,' muttered Sir John.

'She seems very kind and good-natured,' went

on Rachel—'always ready to do anything or go anywhere mamma wants; and then she knows everybody, and is never at a loss. Lady Griffin says she is the most wonderful woman she ever knew.'

'So I should imagine,' commented Sir John.

'And what I do like about her, papa, is the way she always speaks of you; not half highly enough, of course, but still with a kind of reverence and respect I love. I told her the other day how good and noble and unselfish you were; and she said, shaking her head, "Ah, my dear, no one can know that better than I!"'

'Hush, child, hush!' interrupted Sir John; and the girl stopped short, as she often did, wondering why her father could not bear to hear himself praised; why, when she uttered some loving and tender remark, he winced as though she had touched a wound.

'I have always forgotten to ask you something, papa,' she went on after a pause. 'Was Mr. Seaton a very wicked man?'

Sir John looked up at the interlacing branches of the trees overhead as he asked,

'How can I tell, my dear?'

'Was he not, then?' she persisted.

'Why do you want to know?' he questioned.

'Because Miss Banks declares he was. She is always saying dreadful things about him. I asked her once what he had done, and she said *everything*. What did she mean, papa?'

Sir John laughed outright.

'Seaton was neither more nor less than a commercial rogue, I fancy, Rachel. The best any one can say of him is that he played for high stakes and lost; the worst, that he played with money not his own, and when he fell, pulled many people down with him.'

'Do you mean, papa, he did not do anything more sinful than that?' exclaimed the girl. 'I thought he must have committed some terrible crime.'

'It was a crime, my dear,' answered Sir John, his pale face flushing a little. 'He did not lose his money in honest straightforward trading. I fancy he must have known what the end would be when he took the hard-earned savings of hundreds of

trusting men and women to bolster up his credit. But I don't like to judge him,' went on Sir John; 'it is so easy for a man to get out of the right path, so hard for him to turn back into it again; and when once a person commences to tread the wrong road in business, or—or—in anything, it is well-nigh impossible for him to tell where he may find himself before many years are over. There is one thing I know about Seaton, though, that I always find pleasant to think of: the day Overend's bank went—the very day he knew he himself must go into the *Gazette*—he gave a poor struggling fellow, to whom he owed some account, a cheque for the amount, bidding him go at once and get it cashed.

"Don't delay," he said; "in these times no one can tell what may happen, and I know the sum is of importance to you."

'The man laughed, and answered he would as soon think of doubting the Bank of England.

"The Bank of England may find things tight to-morrow," Mr. Seaton told him.

'Well, he started to get the cheque cashed; but met some one or thing that prevented his reaching

the bank till after four o'clock. Next morning there was what is called a *distringas* on the account; and in the course of the day he knew Seaton's house had gone. He came to me and told me this; and I have always thought better of Mr. Seaton, because when he was in trouble—and he must have been in such trouble then, as no one except a business man can quite understand or sympathise with—he had a thought to spare for another who might be ruined by his fall.'

They walked on in silence for a moment; but Sir John felt the arm she held gently pressed, and knew that the simple story had gone straight from his heart to hers.

'I am glad you have told me that, papa,' she said at last. 'It makes me feel more comfortable and happy; and I like to think of something else,' she added archly; 'of what you did when that poor man came to you and explained his grief.'

'What do you suppose I did, Rachel?' asked Sir John.

'Gave him what he lost and something more,' she answered.

'No, dear, I did not; he would not have taken such a gift; but I helped him. I lent him money which he has since honourably repaid, and I have been able also to put some business in his way. He is doing well now.'

The girl did not speak again immediately; when she did she made what seemed a somewhat irrelevant remark.

'Miss Banks was very intimate with the Seatons.'

'And what then?' asked Sir John.

'Well, I was hoping,' said the girl, colouring, and laughing to hide her confusion at what she could not but feel to be a very awkward speech, 'we should not be sold up as they were. She does seem to have known so many people once very wealthy who have not now "two sixpences," as she says, to "jingle together in their pockets." I think I would rather live upon less at one time than be quite so poor at another.'

'Quite right, my dear,' said Sir John; 'and we will so manage our affairs as to keep two sixpences in our pockets, at any rate.'

He spoke cheerfully, and they walked back in the soft evening twilight talking of other matters; yet afterwards Rachel's words recurred to him with the meaning attached which had no doubt certainly, if unconsciously, inspired them.

Might there not be some mysterious affinity between Miss Banks and ruin, as there is between some places of business and bankruptcy?

Sir John knew quite well, so surely as a man walked into some offices he took his first step towards Basinghall-street. It was not impossible, he felt, for there to be the same sort of ill-fortune in acquaintanceship.

Given results must be produced from certain causes. Without saying anything of what was in his mind, Sir John began to look more closely into his expenditure, and to spend a little time in the examination of his private accounts.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY MOFFAT AT HOME.

MEANTIME preparations for the ball were going on apace. What Lady Moffat said was quite true. Miss Banks had given herself up to the matter heart and soul; she threw herself into the business as though she were the leader of a forlorn hope bound, in the interests of 'those delightful new people the Moffats,' to scale and carry the loftiest walls of society.

Sir John looked on in wonder. He had never known before what a woman could do in the way of spending money when she got 'her head;' and, in fact, he did not know yet what two women might in that way be able to accomplish when they elect to go together along the wide road of foolish extravagance and prodigal expenditure.

Truly Lady Moffat and Miss Banks were going a pace, had he only been aware of the fact; but then the affair was to be on a scale of unprecedented mag-

nificence. There never could have been a house built for the occupation of a private gentleman better designed for the reception of company. All the apartments on one floor—splendid ballroom, magnificent terrace, convenient garden, such a hall for promenading, such facilities in the way of entertaining a large number of people!

'It would be flying in the face of Providence, dear Lady Moffat,' said Miss Banks, 'to make it a sort of hole-and-corner affair;' and accordingly, from purely pious motives, it was decided that the ball should be the 'sensation' of the season.

To get a sufficient number of guests was clearly the first and most important part of the proceedings, and to this end Miss Banks made perhaps more calls within a week than she had ever done before in any seven days of her life.

'What! are you not going?' was her pet formula. 'O, throw everything else over and go. You may never have such a chance again; for it is not likely they will get another such entertainment up in a hurry. Unique in every respect, I assure you! Holyrood House will be like fairyland.'

'Have not been asked,' was generally the reply.

'Not been asked! How is that? How can such an omission have occurred?'

'Very easily accounted for, I should say. We don't know them.'

'Not know them!' Miss Banks would repeat, as if confounded; 'and they are such *delightful* people, quite good people, you understand—not cityish or snobbish. He is a quiet charming creature, and she is still gloriously handsome. You ought to know them; you must know them! Come and call with me, and I will see cards are sent to you. Lady Moffat, who is kindness itself, has taken to me in the most wonderful manner. I can ask her for *anything!*'

Once set rolling, it is wonderful how a thing of this sort increases in size and in importance. Most people began to talk about the Moffat ball; tradespeople of course were full of it; servants, many of whom had, when the 'family' was out at dinner, obtained through the domestics of Holyrood House a surreptitious glance around the rooms, knew not what it was to weary of talking about the glories to

come; ladies living on a certain income, whose ball-days, if they ever had any, were over, talked of the wild doings impending at Mr. Seaton's old place with uplifted hands and bated breath. Dressmakers and milliners were worked to death. Very nice families in the neighbourhood, possessed of many daughters, wished they were going; and even a few of the *crême de la crême*—people who went to Court, and whose names were in the *Peerage*—felt and expressed a certain amount of curiosity concerning the entertainment Sir John Moffat was going to give in Palace Gardens.

Miss Banks would have dearly loved to get these last to appear; but she could not manage it. She was aware her efforts must be futile, and consequently she did not make them.

'We have a very good list, indeed,' she said, in answer to a remark from Lady Moffat on this subject; 'and for the present must be content. The best, the *very* best, people won't come yet. Plenty of lords and honourables could have been got, no doubt, but we don't want *any* lord or *any* honourable. If we have them at all, they must not be black

sheep. I wish that good husband of yours would take up the baronetcy I am told he might have any day. After all, great folks don't think much of a knight. Sir John,' she went on, as the subject of her conversation entered the room, 'I was just asking when your modesty is going to permit of your writing baronet after your name?'

'Never, Miss Banks,' he answered; 'and if I could get rid of this troublesome title of knight—which with all my heart I wish I had never accepted—I should feel most thankful.'

'Really you are too provoking,' said the lady.

'I believe if Sir John could have his choice he would like to be a farm-labourer,' remarked Lady Moffat.

'I do not think you have ever heard me express such a desire,' answered her husband; 'but I can imagine conditions under which I should rather like to be a field-labourer.'

Miss Banks looked at her hostess as Sir John, having delivered himself of this sentiment, went out on the terrace—looked, and significantly raised her eyebrows. Lady Moffat shrugged her shoulders.

No one could accuse *her* of aping that petty virtue, humility.

The guests were bidden, and the guests had accepted; few apologies were offered, and most of those were in their regrets more genuine than is usually the case. It was quite certain the rooms would be crowded; it was also certain that, taking public opinion altogether, people felt Sir John Moffat was doing a proper thing in giving so magnificent an entertainment.

He had seen that timely invitations were sent to those amongst his City acquaintance whom he wished to honour; and, indeed, in this respect Miss Banks had been even more zealous than himself.

'Take my advice,' she said to Lady Moffat, 'and ask all the friends you have ever known. There can be no worse policy than leaving any worthy person out in the cold upon such an occasion. Even if they do not enjoy themselves when they are here, they will like to say they have been here.'

'O, we don't know very many City people,' answered Lady Moffat, in a tone and with a manner which implied she herself despised trade, and felt

she owed nothing to it; 'but we can ask them if you like.'

'Now I wonder what you were,' considered Miss Banks, looking at the speaker with meditative sweetness. 'If you did not happen to be so inconceivably ignorant on many points, I should imagine you must have been a governess. You are not fond of City people, then?' she remarked aloud.

'I? O, I know nothing about them,' said her ladyship.

'I am so glad Mr. Woodham is coming,' observed Miss Banks. She was turning over the notes of acceptance as she spoke. 'I was in a panic lest his mother would not give him leave.'

'Why should she not give him leave?' asked Lady Moffat.

'She is afraid of his looking at a pretty girl,' was the answer. 'She is never easy about him; and I am sure she might be, for he has never yet exhibited the slightest partiality for any one. She always thinks he would be better where he is not. He had a curacy somewhere in the east of London, and she never rested till she persuaded him to come

to St. Theresa's, the church I was telling you about which is getting higher and higher in the way of Ritualism. Now she is in agony because all the young ladies are in love with him; and fifty times a week, I know, wishes he was back at the East-end, or safe amongst the heathen, or anywhere except at Kensington.'

'Why does she not wish him to marry?' asked Lady Moffat, with a faint show of interest.

'Because some day or other he may be Viscount Chesunt, and in the mean time she dreads his making a *mésalliance*. They are as poor as church mice now, and she is prouder than any prelate ever was. They live in Edwardes-square, have a very pretty house, but go nowhere and receive nobody. She is a faded, languid, peevish-looking woman. He is thin and ascetic-looking, with sharp-chiselled features, dark hair, no beard, no moustache, no whiskers, no anything. Judging from dress and appearance, he might be one of the strictest and straitest of his sect; but people say there are many points on which he joins issue with his vicar, and that his vicar only keeps him on because of his blue blood, his severe

and monkish cast of face, and his extraordinary abilities. He can preach such sermons, my dear! You should hear him.'

'I wonder why he is coming,' speculated Lady Moffat, returning as usual to the only sheep likely to interest her.

'He called and left his card for Sir John, if you remember, some time since,' said Miss Banks, going over to a great china bowl—once, no doubt, filled with fragrant rose-leaves, now devoted to the vile uses of a card-basket—and tossing among its contents till she found that of which she was in search. 'Yes, here we have it: "Rev. Noel Woodham, Edwardes-square, Kensington." He told me he had met a brother of Sir John's down in Lancashire; I think he is very anxious to make his acquaintance.'

'O!' said Lady Moffat, and Miss Banks already knew this exclamation was rarely a sign of pleasure on the part of her new friend.

A more lovely morning never dawned than that which ushered in the eventful day. Palace Gardens had never looked so cheerful, Kensington more desirable, Holyrood House so gay.

Even passers-by could catch a glimpse of the glories evening was fully to reveal. Vans of flowers, tradesmen's carts, tradesmen's boys, open-mouthed idlers, blocked up the roadway. Inside all was confusion. Gardeners were at work filling the conservatory, and piling stately plants in the hall and on the terrace; confectioners were bringing in square wooden trays and marvellous boxes; upholsterers were busy likewise; whilst down in the basement, from the butler to the pantry-lad, from the cook to the scullery-wench, all were hard at work—so hard, that an on-looker might have imagined there could not possibly be left any work in them for the night.

As for Miss Banks, any one would have thought she was at least fifty single ladies in one. She was here and there and everywhere. She was in the ballroom, the conservatory, the supper-room, on the terrace; talking to the men who brought the rout-seats, screaming out agonised entreaties and contradictory directions all at once. She had her dress pinned up, and her hair pushed back, and a garden-hat of Rachel's on her head; 'and if ever there was an old guy,' remarked an enraged workman

to his companion, 'that is one;' only he did not say 'guy,' his expression was much stronger. Niel, the invaluable, was coming over the whole day long with notes, and going on messages and bringing back answers. You would not have thought there was so much dust on earth as seemed suddenly to crop up in a moment in that newly furnished and perfectly clean house. It made Miss Banks sneeze at intervals in a highly inconvenient and ludicrous manner. The British artisan contrived to extract a good deal of amusement out of this fact; for whenever two or three of that body were grouped together one could hear a certain rough mimicry of the lady's shrill voice, interrupted by 'tscha, tscha! O dear, this dust how it does get up my nose!' followed by muffled peals of irreverent laughter.

One purveyor from the City was indeed downrightly rude to Lady Moffat's friend. In so many words he said 'he would be glad of her room, that he understood his business, and that he didn't want nobody a-coming and a-fussing about him while he was doing it.'

Except the servants, no one that day had any

regular meal. They had their dinner punctually, and sat for an hour over it with the most praiseworthy diligence. Up-stairs, however, luncheon was a picnic and dinner a farce. During the course of the afternoon Lady Moffat had a comfortable nap; and Miss Banks, subsequent to her rout by the City creature, went home, ostensibly to see after the other dreadful creature, but really to attend to some private and pressing affairs of her own.

Sir John, wisely, had a chop and half-pint of bitter in the City, and so was able to shut himself in his dressing-room when he returned very late from his office. He looked pale and somewhat careworn, Rachel thought, when she went to show herself to him in her new dress.

'Do you like it, papa?' she asked, looking at him with eyes that, reminding him of an old trouble, came often between him and his rest. Ah, what a sweet face it was! what a tender voice! what a true, soft, loving, grateful heart!

'It is not handsome enough,' he answered a little unsteadily. 'I wanted you to have something very handsome indeed.'

'You dear papa, you would like me to wear cloth of gold, I do believe,' she said, laughing.

'I should like you to have everything I could get for you,' he said. 'One thing I trust you will always remember, that this is *your* ball; if it had not been for you, nothing should have made me consent to it. Entirely for you,' he added. 'Solely for you.'

'Papa,' cried the girl, 'you are ill, you are tired. Let me get you a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee, do—'

'No, my child,' he replied. 'I do not need anything except to see you enjoy yourself. Yes, your dress is very pretty.'

'And Edwina's is exactly the same,' she said. 'She does look so nice; she is coming down to show herself presently.'

'There—there, run away now. You are sure to feel pleased about this ball?'

'Why, of course, papa,' she answered. 'I have dreamt of it. I feel now as if it were too good to be real.'

She flitted away, peeping back at him ere she went through the half-closed door, away down the

staircase, across the wide hall, into the ballroom, out on the terrace,—a fair and gracious vision, as the servants who were passing to and fro acknowledged by their whispered words and looks. It was a lovely moonlight night; the place seemed unreal, unfamiliar.

'O Eddy,' she cried, as her sister joined her, 'is it not *too* beautiful, is it not almost *too* much!'

'I only hope mamma won't get into one of her tempers,' remarked Miss Edwina. 'You should have heard her just now because Winter stuck a hairpin into her head: I thought she would have struck her. I came away lest I should come in for a share of whatever might be going.'

'I wish you would not talk that way, Wina. After all, you know—'

'O, yes *I* know,' interrupted the younger girl, who was far too like her mother. 'What do you think that old Banks and the *mater* are plotting? To catch Mr. Woodham for me, so that I may be a viscountess. I heard them. Well, whenever I am married, I never will have Banks inside the doors. I hate her; a detestable gray-haired sycophant, that

is what she is. She is up there now, smoothing down mamma's velvet dress as if she was stroking a cat. And it is "Dear Lady Moffat this," and "Dear Lady Moffat that," and—good gracious, Rachel, let us get in; there are the carriages!'

Yes, there were the carriages; they came on steadily. The rooms got fuller and fuller; never was there a more successful party; save in the ballroom there was scarcely standing room. People were glad to get out into the moonlit garden, and talk poetry or prose, as the case might be, the while they wandered under the stars of the summer night or stood idly looking at the yews in Kensington, what time the strains of music rose and fell, and youth and beauty and wealth and fashion kept time to its measure with twinkling feet.

Ah, it was a lovely party! All along the terrace there were banks of flowers between each of the windows; at the end of the ballroom the conservatory was a blaze of rich colour, relieved by tender green; opening out of the ballroom was the boudoir; opening out of the conservatory the library. You could wander from room to room, and then, crossing

the hall, enter other apartments. You could leave the music behind till its tones grew fainter and fainter; and then, coming out upon the terrace from quite another direction, be again in a moment in the midst of the gay scene. A garden flooded with moonlight; a ballroom filled with fair women and handsome men flitting past dreamily in 'the mazy dance;' the most seductive strains of music; the most delicate of perfumes; life presented in its most graceful and refined and luxurious aspect.

Sir John Moffat looked around him and sighed. Never before had the words of the Preacher seemed to find so true an echo in his heart—that weary, weary heart, vexed with all the storms, tossed with the repentance, of over twenty long years:

'I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?'

Above the strains of the music he could hear the sobbing of the winter wind. Across the calm stillness of the summer night there came borne to his ear the death-cry of one in agony. As in the old Irish stories, wherever a doomed man went, or whatever he chanced to be doing, he beheld the banshee

of his race or heard her moaning cry, so Sir John was haunted by the memory of a face he could not forget, of a voice whose tones rang distinctly adown the long interval of years that stretched between the present and the past.

It was a gay scene that on which his eyes rested. The many-hued dresses, the sparkling jewels, the bright fans, the exquisite flowers, the large rooms, the terrace crowded with laughing guests, the garden flooded with moonlight, the grounds of Kensington so quiet and so lonely just beyond. But he looked on as though he were a mere spectator, as though in it all he had nor part nor lot, as if from a different world he were regarding the pastimes and fripperies and follies of this.

'Papa!' broke in a troubled voice upon his reverie, a voice sweet and low, and yet with a wonderful virtue of distinctness about it. 'Papa, what *are* we to do? There are such numbers of girls without partners, and there is no person to introduce them to any one. Will you come and help?'

'Certainly, my dear; if you tell me what I must do.'

'O, just look up the gentlemen a little, I suppose. They are standing out on the terrace; and you know I cannot go amongst them, and if I could I am not sure of their names.'

'Neither am I, Rachel. I do not know even by sight one quarter of the people who are here to-night.'

'Will you allow me to try and be of some assistance?' asked a third person at this juncture, and there appeared from behind a small thicket of palms a gentleman who was a stranger to both. 'I was not eavesdropping, Miss Moffat,' he added. 'But I heard what you said. I know a great number of the gentlemen who are "out on the terrace;" and, though I do not dance myself, I have no doubt I can set them dancing.'

A spare ascetic-looking man; a man thin as a devotee, with a face too stern and cold, till a smile broke over it, when the whole expression changed.

They were friends in a minute.

'Thank you,' said Sir John heartily. 'We shall be grateful for your help. I confess this sort of thing is quite new to me.'

'And it is new to me,' answered the other. 'I think I have only once before been at a ball in my life. My name is Woodham,' he went on, introducing himself quite easily and naturally; 'and I used to know your brother, Sir John, when I was a curate in Lancashire.'

There came a dull red glow into Sir John's usually pale face; but he only said, stretching out his hand, that he was glad to see Mr. Woodham, and was sorry not to have been able to make his acquaintance sooner.

'And you, Miss Moffat,' said Mr. Woodham, looking down at the pretty young creature, dressed out in her harmless finery, with youth and beauty still hers, and the great indefinite future stretching all before. 'I feel as if you and I were quite old friends. I have heard so much about you from Mrs. Hemans. I never see her that she does not tell me you have taken her down tea and sugar.'

'I am afraid she likes the tea and sugar much better than she does me,' answered Rachel, laughing.

'Perhaps so; but we cannot always dissociate the gift from the giver.'

He gave her his arm, and they went together through the flowers and foliage on to the terrace, leaving Sir John to make his way into the ball-room.

'Remember I do not dance,' said Mr. Woodham, looking down with a man's natural admiration for what was good to the sight and pleasant to the mind; 'so I must not monopolise you one moment longer than we can avoid.'

'O, thank you; but I should not like to dance,' she answered, in her pretty modest way, 'with so many guests sitting still. I left my last partner as soon as I could, and went round by the other rooms to find papa.'

How sweet and simple she was! How fair, how innocent, how unselfish!

'What, are you not dancing?' thus Mr. Woodham addressed one group of young men.

'No; but we should like to dance,' they answered almost with one voice, pointing the sentence with a look at Rachel. 'Still, we can't go up to a young lady and ask her for the next valse without an introduction.'

'Sir John will be only too happy to introduce you, I am sure of that. We shall find him in the ballroom, shall we not, Miss Moffat?'

Yes, Sir John was not far distant. Close by one of the windows they found him talking to a City lady, the mother of two nice daughters.

It was wonderful how easy Mr. Woodham seemed soon to make it for them, and how willing all the gentlemen were to take even unpromising partners when Rachel smiled her thanks.

'That eldest daughter is a nice girl,' said mothers approvingly. 'It is a pity she is not the hostess. As for Lady Moffat, she has not taken the slightest trouble to find a partner for any one.'

It was true. Having got her guests together, Lady Moffat thought they could amuse each other, or rather she did not concern herself about the matter in the least. Surrounded in her boudoir with a little court, she neither knew nor cared whether pretty Alice Gresham, who had 'so counted' upon this ball, was sitting in a corner ready to cry her bright eyes out with vexation, or gliding swiftly over the floor, her card already full of engagements.

Poor Rachel, though she knew so little of society, possessed the finest instincts of hospitality, and it would have seemed as dreadful to her to be helped first at table with visitors present as to continue dancing herself and see guests waiting for partners unnoticed.

When she ran round to seek her father she could have shed tears of shame; but now it was all right. Every one was getting to know everybody; people were talking pleasantly even without having been introduced. Pretty Alice Gresham was admiring the flowers in the conservatory in company with an officer who could tell her stories about the Court; and she squeezed Rachel's fingers as she passed by, and whispered.

'Your father is a darling!'

Miss Banks, to do her justice, had worked hard; but then, as she said pitifully afterwards,

'What could *one* woman do, and she not the hostess?'

She came now up to Rachel and her escort, with Edwina—bright, flushed, hair-tossed, saucy, happy.

'Mr. Woodham,' she began, 'will you try to keep this naughty girl quiet for five minutes? She is trying to kill herself. Take her for a turn round the garden.'

'With the greatest pleasure,' said Mr. Woodham demurely, 'if you and she think it would be prudent.'

'O, *I* am not going out into the garden,' said the girl, with more than an imitation of her mother's rudeness. 'I prefer gaslight to moonlight any day.'

'Is not that somewhat of a bull?' asked Mr. Woodham, while Rachel stole an entreating hand upon her arm, and Miss Banks remarked, 'Well, you ought not to dance any more at present, I think, my dear;' then to Rachel, 'Sir John is looking for you.'

'Ah, I thought so,' said the girl; 'but I did not know where to find him. Would you kindly tell him I will wait here till he comes?' she added, as Miss Banks, having achieved the business which brought her, turned away.

'How I do hate that woman!' said Edwina, looking after her retreating skirts.

'Eddy, Eddy, Eddy!' entreated her sister softly.

'Rachel, Rachel, Rachel!' retorted the young hoyden. 'What business was it of hers whether I was dancing too much or not? or why did she ask you to take me round the garden, I should like to know?' she added, looking with handsome fearless eyes into Mr. Woodham's face.

He laughed outright.

'You need not be afraid,' he said, 'of my taking you out into the garden or anywhere else against your own free will.'

'I do not mind now,' she answered; 'I should like to go,' she went on, taking his arm uninvited, as Rachel, exclaiming, 'Here is papa,' relinquished it with a little graceful movement and grateful smile. 'Let us go, by all means;' and she drew a shawl closer round her throat, and led the way to the terrace-steps. '*You* are not afraid of catching cold, are you?' she asked.

'Not in the least,' replied Mr. Woodham, amused at, if not attracted by, the *naïveté* of this half child, half woman.

They went down the steps, they paced the first walk, they looked up at the moon, and they glanced back at the ballroom.

'Don't you *hate* Miss Banks?' asked his companion, reverting to her latest grievance.

'No,' he said; 'I hope I hate no one.'

'Do you *love* Miss Banks, then?' she asked, changing her front.

'I am afraid,' he said, 'I do not know enough of the many good qualities I hope Miss Banks possesses to go so far as that.'

'What a funny person you are!' she exclaimed; 'but do you know, I think I like you.'

'I feel highly honoured. You are too kind.'

'Now don't mock me. I cannot bear being mocked; that is the great reason I am so fond of Rachel. She never mocks any one.'

'I should say not.'

'You might say not if you lived with her. Do you see any resemblance in her to papa?'

'No; I fail to trace any.'

'I fancy there is sometimes, particularly in manner. You know she is his pet and companion; and

if people are always together they must get to talk and look like each other.'

'I am afraid I cannot quite agree with you there, Miss—Miss—I want to know your Christian name, please.'

'Edwina,' she said; 'mamma's choice, I am told, and a dreadful choice too, I think. You know mamma, don't you?'

'No; I have seen her, though, and am hoping for the pleasure of an introduction.'

'You don't think Rachel like her, I suppose?'

'Certainly no resemblance occurred to me.'

'In mind, body, or estate?' suggested Edwina (a most audacious young person, Mrs. Woodham would have decided); 'that is what you say in church, is it not, Mr. Woodham?'

'Well, not exactly in the sense you mean, I fancy,' he answered.

'Never mind, it does not signify. What I mean is that Rachel is not like mamma one bit in any way, or like me, or like anything that is not nicest of nice.'

'Are you not nice, Miss Edwina?'

'I daresay I am after a sort of fashion; but I am not like Rachel; nobody is like Rachel, Mr. Woodham.'

They were standing by the light iron railing, or rather hurdle, which is all that divides the royal grounds from the garden of Holyrood House.

'I suppose everybody will soon be out of London?' she remarked.

'Everybody who is anybody,' he answered.

'We are bound for Scarborough,' she said, of course implying she and her people were amongst the 'somebodies;' 'that is, mamma and I and the boys. Rachel has an invitation into Surrey—I am sure I wish I had—and papa means to visit his brother, I think.'

'Not going with you?'

'No; I fancy he has about enough—' she paused, and he could see she crimsoned at the slip she had so nearly made. If she had not coloured furiously he might not have been able so readily to complete the sentence for himself, as was the case.

Of course, knowing Sir John's relations, he understood in a vague sort of way there must be some reason why his family did not visit his wife, and why they never mentioned her name when they could possibly avoid doing so. He had heard rumours of her ungovernable temper, and hints that a good deal of stormy weather had to be put up with in the establishment. The drift of Miss Edwina's chatter also showed him that Lady Moffat's faults did not lie on the side of over-amiability, and he had seen for himself that she neglected the first duty of a hostess; but then, to be sure, he had seen that so often before in the case of other ladies, that he was not astonished to find the mistress of Holyrood House thought of no person's comfort save her own.

For all these reasons, and also a nameless something in the expression of Sir John's face, he guessed that Miss Edwina had as nearly as possible blundered out, 'I fancy he has about enough of mamma at home,' but he only said,

'Yes; I think Scarborough must be very like London. I cannot imagine any one going there

who requires rest. Now your uncle's place is delightfully quiet.'

'Is it? I have never been there,' she answered; and Mr. Woodham felt he had wandered on uncertain ground.

'Shall we go in?' asked the girl. 'It is a little chilly.'

She shivered, and in a fatherly sort of manner he wrapped the light shawl she wore closer round her shoulders.

'You ought not to have come out,' he said. 'I was wrong to allow it. You were so warm with dancing.'

There was a tone in his voice, and a look in his eyes, which made her regard him with quite a new interest.

'He is nice,' she thought; 'and I believe he is good. If he would only fall in love with Rachel, now! O Mr. Woodham,' she added aloud, 'there is that galop, which I do think would make me dance if I was dead. Let us make haste, please. I promised it to Mr. Lassils, and I am sure he is looking for me everywhere.'

Now Mr. Lassils happened to be the partner from whom Miss Banks had carried off the young lady she and Lady Moffat desired to see established as the future possible Viscountess Chesunt.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. LASSILS MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

THE hours went by, but the dancers did not seem to weary. Chaperons and others, whose 'dancing days were over,' grew tired and sleepy, and yawned behind their fans; but young eyes were bright as ever, and young hearts kept as true time to the strains of the enchanting dance-music as did eager and tireless limbs.

Flowers and bouquets began to droop; not so, however, the human flowers grouped in such captivating profusion; dresses became limp, their first glory had departed; but with their wearers the case was different.

Now, when the time was approaching that they must separate, people were getting to know each other: the utter strangers of an earlier period were becoming close acquaintances; girls, who once thought no partner would ever come to claim them,

found themselves engaged for many dances still to follow. Young men were talking recklessly and whispering soft flatteries, some of which had perhaps better never have been spoken, into pretty ears, all too willing to listen.

Cupid was very busy that night in Palace Gardens. He came straight thither, without stopping at the Palace in Kensington, which was wrapped in slumber, and which in truth for the last few centuries he has found a trifle dull, to Holyrood House, where something quite to his mind was whirling in the valse, and scampering round the ballrooms to the strains of a mad galop.

He—the chubby cherub, furnished with his bow and a quiver full of arrows, well tipped and duly provided with the orthodox feathers plucked from a goose's wing—soon put all straight between East and West, between Epping Forest and Westbourne-terrace, between the City and the old Court suburb.

The prince of diplomatists, he immediately cultivated a good understanding between money that had been made and money that had been spent—between the sons and daughters of men who were

toiling and struggling to increase their already large fortunes, and the sons and daughters of others who had never been industrious save in the pursuit of pleasure, or sedulous except to squander what they possessed. He enticed men that evening to seek acquaintance with people who lived away in Essex, or who 'had just persuaded papa' to leave Southgate and other such out-of-the-world suburbs, and take a house at Campden Hill. He induced young ladies to think business might not be 'so dreadful' a thing after all. Young Mammon, they said afterwards, was delightful; 'he had been *everywhere* and seen *everything*, and his step in valsing was perfection.' When in early youth one hears that Lord So-and-So has married the daughter of Mr. Such-and-Such, one wonders at first where the lord and the lady met; but when later on London 'Society' opens its portals to an unsophisticated Englishman, and, standing by a doorway or leaning against a convenient pillar, he contemplates the doings in Vanity Fair, he comes to understand when and how people meet, and comprehends that the whole affair is not one of barter. The daughters are not bought or the sons sold;

there is as much beauty now down East as there was when Osborne, ancestor of the first Duke of Leeds, plunged into the Thames to save his master's heiress; and underlying all the conventional restrictions we place upon a close amalgamation between the Court of St. James's and the Court of the Lord Mayor of London, there is a deep humanity, which says, 'Let the young people remove the arbitrary barriers we have established; let youth and love and hope have their way. Let us each concede something: we will overlook your lack of birth if you will forget our lack of money. We will throw culture and position into one scale, if you will pile high your guineas in the other; for the young people like each other, and it may not be amiss to permit them to have their way.'

And thus, as often as not, the thing is done, and the 'young people' are made happy, or think they are made happy, which is not perhaps quite the same.

Anyhow, to return to our story, in Holyrood House there were that night the foundations laid for many subsequent marriages. Going home in

the cool of the morning, young Mammon thought a good deal about Miss Pedigree, and decided it might not be a bad investment for him to quarter his newly-acquired arms with hers; while Miss Golconda decided there was, after all, a something about West-end eligibles which Mr. Mincing Lane, who had been paying his addresses to her—addresses hitherto not quite unappreciated—lacked.

Those conversant with the ways of society, who have been behind most scenes, know something about balls such as this, and need scarcely be told how, in the midst of all this splendid festivity, the host and hostess were really nowhere. The guests, of course, felt it necessary to speak to Lady Moffat, and those who did not desire to join in the giddy dance felt she was a rock of vantage; but beyond that! Ah, my friends, if most of you felt on this point as Sir John did, there would be fewer grand parties given, and fewer extraordinary matches made.

Quite half the guests present did not know their host even by sight; and during the progress of the entertainment he had, therefore, the advantage of

hearing scraps of conversation, which showed him how little share the givers of the feast had in any of the praises lavished upon it.

'The rooms look very well,' remarked one young fellow to his friend.

'Yes, after all there is no one like Pompadour for this sort of thing; he understands his business thoroughly.'

'What exquisite flowers!' observed a lady walking round the conservatory, to her partner.

'Exquisite; that part of the decoration was left to Fontell, I believe, and one can always depend upon him for producing the greatest effect possible.'

'I do not think I ever saw a finer supper laid out,' said another; 'but then, to be sure, only give Vanille *carte blanche*, and he can perform wonders.'

'Capital wine,' capped his companion; 'these City people have such opportunities for purchasing the best brands for a mere song.'

'Wonderful spread!' was a complimentary comment. 'What are these Moffats?'

'Don't know, I'm sure; never heard of them till

about a month ago. He is something in the City, I think.'

'What lots of money they do make there! I often think I will go into the City myself.'

'Not a bad notion; only I am afraid one requires to be to the manner born.'

'Handsome woman,' Sir John heard again. 'Do you know who she was?'

'No; shouldn't think she had been anybody.'

'Splendid house,' said a gentleman, leaning against an Australian fern, and damaging ever so many of its arching branches. 'Some City man had it before this Moffat, hadn't he?'

'Yes, Seaton.'

'Made a great smash, didn't he?'

'Yes, ruined hundreds—thousands, for all I know.'

'Wonder if our host will go the same road?'

'O no, quite a different line; noted for probity, prudence, and all the other virtues.'

'Well, as a rule, none of them pose for sinners; they are all supposed to be patterns of excellence till found out.'

'I don't think Moffat, from what I have heard of him, is a hypocrite.'

'I have no doubt he is like his fellows,' was the reply.

When a man hears such pleasing scraps of conversation he begins to reflect. If many persons who ruin themselves to give large parties and to receive thankless guests, heard what those guests say of them, they might commence to consider too.

'At least,' thought Sir John, 'if I were Vanille, or Fontell, or Pompadour, some praise might be bestowed upon me; but as I am only the man who will have to pay the piper, no one deems it needful to put in a good word for me.'

He went out on the terrace, feeling the overpowering scent of the flowers in the conservatory, and the talk of the men and women who went there to flirt and gossip, too much for him. Walking listlessly along he became aware that three young men, seated on a bench placed beneath on the grass-plot, were speaking in tones which did not indicate that their discourse was of a confidential nature.

'Why don't I dance?' said one. 'I have been

dancing; but I am not going to do so any more. I was making great running with the youngest girl, a confoundedly pretty little thing, with a good spice of the —— in her, when Miss Banks must needs come and spoil sport. No; I don't dance again. Suppose I am not rich enough. How I do hate that vulgar idea, a man cannot speak to a nice-looking girl without having a design of marrying her!'

'It wouldn't be a bad spec for you, Lassils,' was the reply. 'I daresay she will have a tidy *dot*.'

'Don't believe in City *dots* so long as the people remain in trade. Money made in the City has an uncommon knack of taking unto itself wings. Look at Seaton, for instance. Why, I dined here not a week before the crash, and every one might have sworn he was safe as the Bank of England; besides, I am booked—'

'Booked! how do you mean?' asked a couple of eager voices. 'Engaged?'

'No, I only wish I were; but I have a bride coming from over the sea. Now don't laugh; it is a fact. She is coming all the way from the other side of the world, and I hope and trust she may like

me as I mean to like her. There is something to the tune of eighty thousand pinned up about her; not great wealth, perhaps, you will say, but not penury either.'

There was a laugh at this, which Sir John heard only faintly; for he had walked out of ear-shot long before.

'I should like a little such penury,' remarked one of Mr. Lassil's companions.

'Daresay you would; and so should I. Only wish I may get the chance of liking it.'

'Why, I thought you said you were "booked,"' said the other.

'So I am, if she will have me. I intend to have her, no matter what she is, supposing I can get her.'

'And how stand the chances?' asked his friend.

'Can't tell you in the least. Everything depends on the lady. If she says yes, I will marry her; if she says no, I suppose I can't marry her.'

'But what makes you think she will say yes?' persisted his former questioner.

'I don't think she will say yes, or, for that

matter indeed, no. One never can tell what women may do. However, we shall soon know; for she is on her way home, and I am here ready to welcome her.'

'What is she like, Lassils?'

'Have not an idea; never saw her in my life.'

'Is she a real personage, or one born of your own imagination?'

'Real,' was the answer, 'too real; and there is eighty thousand hanging to her: consider that for a clerk in the War Office.'

'Still I cannot understand why you imagine she will jump at your offer.'

'I have told you before I do not think so. I do not know what to think. All I can tell you is, I hope she may look favourably upon me; and for this reason—that, if she does not, she loses the fortune.'

'And you get it?'

'Would that I did! No, the old idiot who made the will provides for any contingency of that sort with a vengeance. If I won't have her, or she won't have me, in fact if we do not marry, however hateful

we find each other on acquaintance, the money goes to the old idiot's next of kin. The will was made about the time we were both born, I think, or rather when we were both juvenile, for the lady is my junior. A nice way to hang a man's prospects, isn't it? The old imbecile only died last autumn, and the good news had to be sent to the furthest ends of the earth.'

'I hope there may be no hitch, with all my heart,' said one of his friends.

'And that she may not be as ugly as sin.'

'Say as Miss Banks,' entreated Mr. Lassils. 'She is uglier than any sin I ever encountered.'

'Dreadful old hag,' commented the other two in chorus.

'Sha'n't forgive her in a hurry, coming between me and my partner,' said Mr. Lassils. 'Nicest little girl I have met with this many a day; I wish the eighty thousand lay between her and me.'

'I think the elder the prettier.'

'O dear, no!' scoffed Mr. Lassils. 'There is no go about her. They don't seem to care much what *she* does. I daresay I might have danced every

other set with her and no one objected: not a patch on the little one.'

'Hit,' commented the man who had found most to say on the subject.

'Hard,' capped the other.

Mr. Lassils only laughed, as, rising and saying he was going for a turn round the garden, he left his friends to return to the ballroom, whence they heard the strains of the 'Blue Danube.'

Mr. Lassils walked on till he came to a small summer-house, placed close by Kensington Gardens. It was quite deserted. Of late the guests had been devoting themselves more and more to the pleasures of dancing. The night was growing old, so old that, by this time, indeed, morning had taken its place; and in the air there was that strange chilliness which comes when one day lies dead, and another, not long born, is struggling into existence.

'I wonder how late they mean to keep it up, and at what time my sister will have had enough of it,' thought Mr. Lassils, as he entered the summer-house, and stretched himself full length on one of the seats. 'I wish I dare have a smoke; I wish I

was in bed; I wish I was asleep;' and then he yawned portentously, and began thinking about his future and that eighty thousand pounds he should have so liked without the wife, and then of the youngest Miss Moffat, who had certainly taken his fancy by storm, and who had been torn from him ruthlessly by Miss Banks. 'A dear little girl,' he decided. 'I don't know when I have seen any girl I liked half so much.' And then he thought again of the eighty thousand and his poor salary in her Majesty's Civil Service, and of the mode in which Sir John Moffat would be likely to crush all aspirations after his daughter's hand from an ineligible like himself. 'No, it wouldn't do,' he decided; 'but she is the prettiest, brightest, sauciest young thing I ever met. Hullo,' he said softly, 'what's that?'

A shadow was thrown across the threshold of the summer-house; a shadow not belonging to any one in Sir John Moffat's grounds. Coming noiselessly over the grass, some person had taken up a position under a great elm-tree, and was standing almost behind the place where Mr. Lassils sat, listening to

the sounds of the music, and looking towards the ballroom, the interior of which could be distinctly seen from that portion of Kensington Gardens.

Glancing out of the little window above his head, Mr. Lassils could see him distinctly: a tall man, with something *outré* and un-English in his appearance, thick beard, heavy moustache, standing there absorbed in the scene he contemplated, one hand resting on the light iron railing so often mentioned in this story, and the other removing frequently from between his lips a large cigar.

Stealthily Mr. Lassils crept from his concealment, and, placing his hand suddenly on that of the stranger, cried,

'Caught!'

'Fairly caught,' was the answer, spoken without the least sign of confusion or alarm. 'I did not think that there was any one so near me.'

'And if not an impertinent question, what are you doing in Kensington Gardens at this time of the night, or rather this time of the morning?'

'I rather fancy it is an impertinent question,' was the reply; 'but still I am happy to answer it.

I am looking at a scene which seems to me exceedingly novel and pretty.'

'Granted; and yet—'

'A cat may look at a king,' said the other, as Mr. Lassils paused. 'I have been a long time absent from England, but I suppose no fresh enactment has made it penal for a man to turn spectator when a merrymaking such as this is in progress?'

'Well, no,' conceded Mr. Lassils; 'but still—'

'Do you think I have a design on the spoons?' asked the stranger, laughing. 'Fact is, I suppose I ought not to be here, and that if any of the park-keepers, supposing there are such beings, were to see me, they would want to know more than even you do. I live above here a little way.'

'O, do you?' said Mr. Lassils.

'Yes. As I returned late home, after dining with an old friend, I saw this house brilliantly lighted up, and understood a party was in progress; not feeling inclined for sleep, I happened to be walking round my garden a while ago, and the fancy seized me to have a look at the dancers. The music drew me,' he went on. 'Ah, you don't know what

it is to have been away from civilisation till the strains of a galop and the soft tones of a valse seem to recall to one's memory thoughts of another world!'

'If you would care to have a nearer view of the festivities going on in this world at the moment, come along. I'll introduce you. I am just in the mood. I don't care what I do; besides, the host does not know even a quarter of his guests by sight, and I am very sure the hostess does not. Come on, I will be godfather.'

'You are exceedingly kind, I must say,' answered the other; 'though it strikes me your offer is more impulsive than prudent. However, I won't avail myself of it; I would rather see fairyland from a distance than be a sojourner in it. Certainly as seen from here it is a very pretty pantomime.'

'There will be a transformation scene with some of the women when they go home in the unflattering light of morning,' returned Mr. Lassils. 'I think I will go over the fence, and see how it all looks from your side;' and suiting the action to the word, he leapt the railing, and next minute stood on the grass in Kensington.

'There is not much difference, I imagine,' remarked the other.

'Just this, that I know I had a right to be there, and I have none to be here; that adds a great pleasure to the view. Strange now I knew the Seatons, and it never once entered into my head to pass this boundary.'

'Who were the Seatons?' asked his new acquaintance.

'City people. Wherever there is a fine house, you may be sure a City man lives in it. Did you never hear of the Seatons?'

The gentleman who had come to look on shook his head.

'I have been quite out of the way of hearing about City people,' he said.

'He was not half a bad sort of fellow; but he made an awful smash. Everything came to the hammer — horses, carriages, furniture, pictures, house.'

'I see; and who has the house now?'

'Another City man.'

'Will he smash too?' asked the other.

'Likely enough. They always think it necessary to do things on such a gigantic scale. However, for the sake of his daughter, I trust his things may not come to the hammer.'

'O, he has a daughter, then?'

'Two; but one especially—the nicest little girl—awfully pretty. Do just come and have a look at her.'

'Thank you, but pretty girls have no interest for me now. What is the name of your host?'

'Moffat—Sir John; and if you saw him at this minute, you would say he was longing to be back in his counting-house, or anywhere rather than in the midst of his guests.'

'Well, I don't know whether he is peculiar in that. Many men, I imagine, never feel less at home than when receiving visitors. How did he get his baronetcy?'

'He is not a baronet—would not be one—has some crotchet about making an eldest son. He won his spurs serving out soup, or some refreshment of that sort, time of the Lancashire famine. People call him a philanthropist. Always feel doubtful

about philanthropists myself; always fancy they take precious little out of their own pockets, and dip precious deep into the pockets of their neighbours.'

The gentleman who had been so long absent from the delights of society laughed, and said,

'You seem in a cynical mood—inclined to copy Diogenes in Palace Gardens.'

'And why not?' asked Mr. Lassils. 'Palace Gardens is as good a place as any other in the metropolis to set up a tub. Lord, if I was a parson, could not I preach sermons about the vanity of vanities I have seen come to naught within a stone's throw of where we are standing!'

'And not being a parson, you deride the follies in which you take a share.'

'Don't hit without the gloves,' answered Mr. Lassils good-humouredly. 'Look, some of them are coming out to try and catch their deaths of cold. Let us move away a little, or we shall have the whole party in Kensington.'

They passed beyond the shading elm-tree, and then the stranger said,

'Come up to my place and have a glass of wine.'

'All right,' answered Mr. Lassils, murmuring to himself, 'Well, this is just one of the very funniest experiences I ever had in London.'

'Your experience cannot have been very large, then,' answered the stranger, who caught the muttered remark, 'or else life in England presents less variety than I imagined. I do not set myself up for a judge, remember,' he went on, 'for nearly half my life has been spent abroad.'

'Where?' asked Mr. Lassils. He saw at a glance his companion had not been in any service recognised at the Horse Guards.

'Where?' repeated the other; 'here and there and everywhere, I was going to say; but to be more precise, the United States, California, Australia, New Zealand, India—'

'Lord bless me!' exclaimed Mr. Lassils, looking askance at the man who made this statement. 'Why, it must have taken you all your time.'

'There is plenty of time out of England,' answered the other. 'I never knew what it was to be so hurried in any of the places I have named as in London. Here we are; these are my diggings.'

Mr. Lassils looked at the house indicated, and recognised it at once as a place which had until lately been to let furnished.

'Shall I set you an example?' said his new acquaintance, placing a hand on the fencing and vaulting over.

'It is odd, now, is it not,' said Mr. Lassils, following suit, 'that I feel just like a burglar?'

'Force of habit,' answered the other. 'You see, I have lived a wild life of perpetual change, where we had no time or occasion to form habits. Do you know this house?'

'Only from the outside. A brace of maiden ladies lived here.'

'And they are abroad for their health. Well, I must say I am glad to hear you have no associations with the place.'

'Why?'

'Because I want to believe I am making a good beginning again in England. I do not wish to feel I am walking through rooms where a man has fought with fortune and been worsted.'

As he spoke he unlocked a glass door affording

ingress to a small room on the ground floor—a cosy room, one wherein Rachel Moffat might have thought it possible to live.

A lamp was burning on the table; bookshelves lined the walls; a few comfortable chairs were dispersed about the apartment.

'I can only offer you a choice of the most ordinary wines,' said the host, addressing Mr. Lassils, who looked around him, and really felt as if he was in a dream.

'Port, sherry, claret; there is good brandy here, and people who are judges tell me this whisky may be relied upon.'

'I think I will take some brandy, thank you,' answered the younger man, 'though I believe I have had as much of Sir John's champagne as is good for me.'

The gentleman from abroad did not make any reply, but looked at him as though the same idea had occurred also to his mind.

'I suppose,' went on Mr. Lassils, as he slowly took his brandy, which he had not drowned with the addition of too much water, 'I may call and see you

at some more civilised hour hereafter; that is, I hope you do not want our acquaintance to drop as suddenly as it has begun.'

'I shall be very glad to see you,' answered the other, 'when I come back here again. I am going away for a while; that is, I shall be backwards and forwards occasionally, but not to be relied upon, say, for three months.'

'Well, I don't suppose anybody will be who can get away,' said Mr. Lassils. 'If you are down in our direction at any time, I wish you would look me up;' and he laid a card upon the table, and was proceeding with some further remark, when happening to glance at the timepiece, he exclaimed,

'What, is it so late? I must be off; my sister will be looking for me everywhere.'

'Which way shall you go back?' asked his entertainer.

'The way I came, better, quicker. I have no hat, either. Could not well face Sir John's butler without a hat.'

They went down the garden together, and shook hands at the bottom of it. Mr. Lassils in a trice

was again in Kensington, and running rapidly towards the grounds of Holyrood House, while his late host stood thoughtfully looking after the retreating figure.

'A type of a class, I suppose,' he considered, 'and a large class too. Well, I suppose there is good in him somewhere, and work also, though appearances are against the supposition;' and he strolled slowly back to the house, still followed by the strains of the music, which seemed, like running water, to know no weariness, no cessation.

When he reëntered the room, and was about to remove the brandy to the side table, his eye happened to fall on the card his visitor had laid down.

'Let us see what his name is,' he said. 'Lassils —"C. V. Lassils." Now that is odd; it is very odd indeed.'

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY MOFFAT.

EVERY one was out of town; the season was quite over, and, excepting a few millions of toilers and moilers, not a soul remained in London. The upper ten thousand were gone, the lower hundred thousand had followed suit; the camp-followers, who are always hovering where rank and fashion and wealth congregate, had dispersed also—shopkeepers to favourite watering-places; tutors, governesses, teachers of all sorts, to such holiday resorts as it was within their means to compass; there was not a creature left in the great metropolis, not one worth calling, in the language of good society, a human being.

To the uninitiated, to the cousins up for the first time from country vicarages and remote towns and quiet villages, London must still have seemed very full indeed; but to the accustomed eye Babylon

looked desolate, her streets deserted, her inhabitants departed.

For all the people who make the pageant of fashionable life were absent; none were left save those that line the footways and jostle each other in the horse-road. Dives was gone; clothed in his purple and fine linen, he adorned the West-end no longer; and though Lazarus was left, he had to seek his crumbs in less aristocratic quarters. There were no carriages to be seen, because their owners had betaken themselves abroad, Scotland, the provinces, anywhere, so it were far enough out of London. Streets, squares, places, terraces, presented only long lines of closely-shuttered houses; save in the business thoroughfares there was no press of pedestrians; there were not many cabs crawling about or rattling merrily along; railway vans did not seem half so plentiful, the shops looked empty; there was not much doing in the City, save cheating, which there, as elsewhere, goes on in season and out of season; the heads of great firms were almost all absent; a man, whatever his necessities, could scarcely have collected an account within sound of Bow bells; the

dragon and the grasshopper, idly basking in the full blaze of the afternoon sun, looked down on counting-houses where chiefs were not, and where clerks yawned audibly in the City stillness. It was the height of out of the season. A man could not have got together twelve dinner-guests of his own set for love or money.

Palace Gardens followed the prevailing fashion. All the mansions that were not 'to let' were closely shut up; and even the caretakers of those which were to let felt it was scarcely worth while to open the shutters till 'people began to come to town.'

The blinds were drawn down in Holyrood House, as though all the family was dead; no cards were left—there was no one to leave them; the knocker was silent: no visitor came near to waken the echoes of the spacious hall. In most of the adjoining residences the servants had their friends in to tea, and played croquet on the lawns on Sunday afternoons and evenings; they also asked one or other of their relations to spend a week with them, and occasionally lodged those relations in missus's room or the best guest-chamber.

At Holyrood House, however, such high jinks were not yet in progress. Sir John still lingered in town. As Simonds the butler poetically expressed the fact, 'He is the last rose of summer left blooming alone; and for my part,' added that functionary, 'I wish he was blooming somewhere else. It is too bad; it is, upon my conscience. This is the time when gentlemen of my profession look for a little leisure. I wonder how masters think their poor servants are to keep their health if they never have an hour's holiday. If it wasn't in the main a good place as places go, I would give notice. I never did live before where the governor remained in town so long out of the season, and I feel it a sort of lowering of my own dignity.'

It was unfortunate, but incapable of remedy. Sir John, who would have felt glad if the whole race of butlers had been swept off the earth, and who as the years rolled by was getting to care less and less for many things to which he once attached some value, went down to the City in the morning and returned from the City in the evening, without offer-

ing to Simonds the slightest explanation or apology for his conduct.

'I had often been told there were things against entering the families of City gents,' confided Simonds to a friend of his; 'but I never knew where the difficulty lay till now.'

'What do you mean to do?' asked the other, who was in the poorest of services and on the shortest of board-wages, and who instantly thought what a good thing it would be if he could walk into the vacant place at Holyrood House.

'Well, I hardly know,' was the answer—there had been a sympathetic tone in his friend's voice and an eager twinkle in his hungry eyes which warned Simonds how the land lay. 'I have considered the matter in all its bearings, and think it would scarcely do for me to remonstrate with him. We are new, you see, very new; and he might scarcely take it in the spirit in which it was meant.'

Upon the face of this earth there never existed a man less likely to have 'taken' anything of the sort than Sir John Moffat. There is probably no class of people so far removed, so hopelessly removed,

from all idea of what is passing in the minds of the lower orders as those who have made, or are making, their money in business.

Sir John could certainly just as easily have read a newly-found batch of hieroglyphics as even imagined the wild dissatisfaction with which Simonds was regarding his present conduct. If he had known it, nothing about the affair would have struck him as natural or humorous. He could not have entered into the childish desire for change which is an integral part of a servant's nature, as we and our forefathers in our wisdom have moulded the nature of those who minister to our wants. Still less would he have seen anything comical in Mr. Simonds' idea of instructing his master.

Humour was a thing which had been quite forgotten at Sir John's birth. The fairy who confers the delightful, if pecuniarily unprofitable, gift of finding something amusing even when the joke is at one's own expense was absent on the occasion in question. He was not so constituted that he could not understand a witticism, though it gave him little enjoyment; but his organisation was such that the

funny side of the question never touched and tickled his fancy. Here is one of the compensations of life: the man who can laugh is happier than he who knows how to amass. A successful investment often yields no more pleasure than an opportune *mot;* the dinner of herbs, if only the grateful anecdote be present to season it withal, seems more delightful than the stalled ox, partaken of in gloomy silence and digested with no sauce of liveliness or grace or fancy to assist the process.

Sir John, however, it was quite clear, could not stay in town for ever. He had in his own fashion, which was very grave and very distant, at length intimated as much to Mr. Simonds. The next day was to see the 'last of him,' as that most respectable butler intimated to the cook.

'What *we* ought to have done, Mrs. Larrup,' he said, repeating once again what he had said so often before, 'was to take a house at the sea—there's great liberty always at the sea, and many opportunities,' by which phrase Mr. Simonds meant perquisites. 'And it is all along of that old cat, I do believe, we are a-muggering-muggering at the Grand Hotel at

Scarborough. It's the first time, as I am given to understand, her ladyship has ever taken up with hotels, and let us hope it will be the last.'

'Amen,' said Mrs. Larrup piously; for she could not, while the family was absent, in any conscience, or, more properly speaking, with any chance of not coming to grief over the transaction, run up the butcher's bill to a satisfactory point as regards dripping, and she held that to cook and 'nothing come of it' was a mere waste of energy.

From which conversation it will be seen Lady Moffat had really gone to Scarborough, and inferred Miss Banks had accompanied her.

This was indeed the case. Miss Banks was of the company. She had left the 'dreadful object' to the care of Niel, and gone off to recruit herself after her arduous labours in (not) attending to the invalid.

As Palace Gardens differed from Carlton Hill, so did this visit to Scarborough differ from all other seasons Lady Moffat had hitherto spent out of town. Ever since her marriage her life had been a quiet one, as free from excitement as from pecuniary

anxiety. In her wildest imaginings she had never deemed it possible for her to become a leader of fashion, a lady of great social importance, a woman about whom many people would talk, a person it would be considered an honour to know. Even when Sir John bought Holyrood House, her ambition had not soared above balls such as were given by other ladies of her acquaintance, or dull dinner-parties after a similar pattern to those her husband and herself occasionally partook of in company with a certain number of other guests, all drawn carefully from the same pecuniary grade as themselves.

Holyrood House, however, and Miss Banks had enlarged her horizon. With wonder and contempt she looked back at the humdrum existence she had led while she was, as she mentally put it, 'young enough to enjoy herself.'

The years passed in a monotonous respectability, in domestic decorum, in dull propriety, seemed as they recurred to memory as so much time wasted, time which in a woman's life could never be recalled. She might have been a reigning belle, her pictures might have hung in the Academy (no, on second

thoughts that involved too much publicity), she might have been talked of as a beauty, she might have been presented at Court. O, had she but known Miss Banks or some one such as Miss Banks say fourteen years previously, what could she not have achieved! Social success—the sort of notoriety always so dear to the heart of such a woman—enjoyment, parties, admiration; but yet it was not quite too late. She could not recall the time wasted; nevertheless there were still many hours before that period when she should be 'quite old.'

She was, if not young, a handsome woman; her glass, her maid, her milliner, Miss Banks, told her that. She had money, position, opportunity to produce a mark on society. The ball was at her feet—And then there came a curious mental pause, during which an awful terror shook her nerves— Was it? At any hour, at any minute, might not the luck of the cards turn, and she, who had already scored so many tricks, find herself hustled from the social game a hopeless loser?

She did not often think of this; there had been a time when she scarcely thought of it at all; when

she was able to forget all about the matter, as many people forget best part of their lives the certainty of death and eternity; but since Fortune had smiled upon and made her a greater lady than even her most fanciful dreams could have pictured, since she had acquired so much that the very thought of surrendering any portion made her tremble, the memory that she was not quite secure obtruded itself more frequently, and the very greatness of her position cast an awful shadow, at which with half-averted eyes she was forced occasionally to glance.

After Sir John was knighted, after the first blush of that glory had worn off, and she began to find the difference between a rank held merely for life and one which must be transmitted, she said one day in his presence to her eldest son,

'You have little to thank your father for. If he had been like anybody else, some day people would have called you "Sir" too.'

There ensued an ominous silence. The lad answered nothing; her husband read on as though he had not heard her words. Even she was daunted; for one brief second Sir John had lifted his eyes ere

dropping them again on the page he failed to see. She felt she had gone too far, that something must follow indiscretion, and something did.

'Mira,' began Sir John, when, his son leaving the room, they were alone. 'Stay a moment,' he went on, for she was going also; 'I want to speak to you.'

He rose and crossed to the door to see it was closely shut, and then came back to where she sat defiantly with hands folded one over the other.

'Are you mad,' he asked, 'to go on in this way? Don't you know that were I a baronet to-morrow Gilbert never could succeed to the title?'

'I don't see why,' she retorted. 'I do not suppose you would tell, and I am sure I should not.'

He turned to a bookcase, and taking down a *Peerage* which happened to be on one of the shelves, turned over the leaves till he came to a paragraph suitable for his purpose.

'Here, you see,' and he held the volume before her, and with his fingers italicised as it were particular passages as he read: "Blank, 9th Bart. creat. 1696. Sir Blank Blank, son of the 8th Baronet by

the daughter of James Snowdon, Esq., of Ilfradale, Northumberland. Born in Piccadilly 1805; *married* 1839, eldest daughter of G. Harwood, Esq. Residences, Craig-a-lea, Lanarkshire; Largelands, Halliford, Middlesex. Heir, his son Ralph, *born* 1841." You hear?'

'Yes, I hear. Now read me about some knight; where are *you?*'

'Not in this book yet. I shall be next year.'

'Well, and then?'

'Then, I hope, nothing. They have sent me a form to fill in, of which I have taken not the slightest notice. Had I thought of *you*, I should have declined being knighted; as it was, I thought only of our boy.'

She looked at him with an ugly sneer.

'Surely,' she said, 'you might have filled in any dates.'

'I could not do that, Mira,' he answered.

'What,' she persisted jeeringly, 'would that have been more difficult than visiting a sick man and helping a sick man under an assumed name because he had a pretty wife?'

He did not answer her, he did not say a word—he knew out of that first weakness had grown all the other sin; but time had taught him it was not of the slightest avail appealing to the generous instincts of a woman who could not understand what the word generosity meant.

'Why don't you speak?' she asked, after an impatient pause. 'I suppose you are not going to tell me you mean to say nothing whatever?'

'That is precisely what I do intend, Mira,' he answered. 'You do not perhaps understand these things. I am beginning to have a glimmering of how they work. If I say nothing, they can guess nothing; but if I fill in the smallest particular, I give a handle they would not be slow to use. For instance, suppose I were to write, "Married widow of Thomas Palthorpe, Esq., 185—," some one would at once set to work and find out who Thomas Palthorpe was, and discover that in the year mentioned he was not dead, but in Australia. On the other hand, suppose I were to state, "Married 185—" any one looking at the entry would know there was a mystery connected with the children. Are you ill,

Mira? I would not have said even this much if you had not forced it from me.'

She waved him back; she sat down again in the chair from which she had partly risen, looking white as death, sick and wan and worn. She was beginning to understand—vaguely, it is true, but still, after a fashion—the thousand doors through which discovery might come. Any hour, any minute, one might swing on its hinges, and a haunting terror, taking palpable shape, stalk across her life.

'I never meant to harass you with all the doubts that have tormented me,' continued her husband; 'but I want now to put the matter plainly before you, so that we need not again recur to it. I would not accept a baronetcy because of the consequences I knew it must involve. To please you, and also to rebut doubts which I knew were arising, I consented to be knighted, and have repented the concession every hour since that honour was put upon me. We were happier in obscurity, Mira, if you could only think it. For persons situated as we are, there is no safe path save through the valley.'

She did not answer; she heard, but she made

no sign. She knew by experience on some points it was useless to argue with her husband, and that nothing she could say would induce him to do the thing she herself would have done without the smallest scruple—namely, fill in any name, any date, any falsehood, which might even temporarily serve her turn.

He had now lived so many years with the weight of a disgraceful secret oppressing him, and the gnawing of a terrible repentance eating into his very soul, that he could never, during the whole of their married experience, be said to have known the meaning of the word happiness; but he did not intend to try and find a way out of the maze of difficulties in which this sin had involved him by heaping up falsehoods, by weaving fresh entanglements that would enmesh those who came after him. She, on the contrary, would have told any number of untruths likely to suit her immediate purpose, and backed them up by more, if necessary; for, though she had neither the temper nor the nature which lies glibly and tells falsehoods apparently for the mere pleasure of lying, she was troubled by no scruples of conscience, or any

of those fears that deter wiser people from entering upon a road of which it is impossible to see the end.

Lady Moffat was not a clever or an educated woman. Time and association had taught her nothing save a few of the conventionalities of society. She had not hitherto been thrown amongst persons versed in the ways of the world. She had heard petty gossip, but not that deep, searching, probing gossip which certainly expands the minds, while it destroys the heart. The people amongst whom her way had hitherto lain were very quiet, very respectable, very circumscribed in their ideas, very narrow in their notions, not given to much talk concerning the many objectionable matters which are now so freely talked about in fashionable society, and possessing no knowledge whatever of the scheming and plotting and wickedness carried on in the great world into which they had never penetrated.

Miss Banks knew more of sin than all of them put together. She had heard more scandalous stories, listened to more dreadful revelations, than those quiet ladies could have imagined being repeated to any decent woman. There was no topic upon which

she discoursed in the *abandon* of friendly confidence that she left free from a track of slime. Terrible tales had she of the doings in apparently respectable families; horrible narratives, some of which had to be told almost in whispers—narratives one might well hope, for the credit of humanity, had not a syllable of truth about them—and yet still which were repeated so circumstantially and with such dramatic force of description and choice of words that they took possession of the imagination, and haunted the memory with frightful tenacity, when far better things were quite forgotten, and stories of good deeds and transcendent virtue had completely faded away from recollection.

Quite safely it may be averred there was not a scandal, true or false, connected with the Upper Ten, Miss Banks had not at her fingers' ends. As a dog digs up some unsavoury bone, so Miss Banks, if there were an unclean thing buried and put out of sight, disinterred it for the benefit of sympathetic acquaintances.

With her, youth was not innocent or age secure. She had heard some terrible thing about this girl-

wife or that elderly father of a family. Those set in authority were not safe from her tongue; and those who of preference sought obscurity were dragged from their retreat, that the scars of old sorrows, the tears of bitter suffering, might be brought to light.

Amongst other matters of which, from time to time, she discoursed at length to Lady Moffat was the case of a certain lady, who had not been, as the discreet spinster phrased it, 'married at the proper time.' She and her husband were at the precise period so poor and so obscure that the world never troubled its head about them, and when they emerged from penury they were received 'like anybody else, and matters taken for granted.' Eventually the whirligig of time brought this event about. Her husband succeeded to a title, a *great* title, explained Miss Banks with emphasis, and she found herself all at once a very grand lady.

'Then,' proceeded the old gossip, 'came a bitter trouble. Some horrid person discovered that only a few weeks elapsed between the marriage and the birth of the eldest son. They were in despair. How to keep the secret intact they could not devise. They

bribed one editor, they brought influence to bear upon another, they got the boy of a third into the Blue Coat School; but there was a fourth man who scoffed at all their offers. He, it appears, had some old grudge against the husband, and declared he would never forget or forgive it. The lady went to this creature to see what her entreaties would do. I heard she knelt to him all in vain. However, at last he said, "You have a daughter; let her marry me, and then the matter can remain in the family."'

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Lady Moffat.

'And she did marry him,' proceeded Miss Banks, 'and they are the most miserable pair I suppose you ever heard of. Live like cat and dog. However, anything was better, I suppose they all thought, than such a scandal; so you see even the very highest in the land have their troubles.'

'But I cannot imagine what good the marriage effected,' said the auditor, 'if every one knew about the matter.'

'But every one did *not* know,' corrected Miss Banks.

'*You* know;' and the remark cut so cleverly two

ways, that Miss Banks looked keenly at Lady Moffat if she meant it in any double sense.

'I? O yes, of course,' she answered after that momentary scrutiny. 'I am acquainted with some of their nearest relations; but the world has not an idea of the fact—the son himself has not, poor fellow!'

'It would not signify much, I should think, if he had,' returned Lady Moffat. 'His position is secure enough, I suppose?'

Miss Banks gave a little scream, and threw up her hands in despair.

'My dear soul,' she cried, 'you must not say such things. I know you are delightfully radical in all your views, but the world is not yet ripe for the reception of such opinions. Of course it does not matter how frankly you speak to me; but do not, for goodness' sake, talk in that way to other people. They would not understand it in the least.'

This pleasing anecdote, in which, it may be remarked, there was not a single word of truth, though to Miss Banks no credit could be ascribed for that, as she merely repeated what she had heard from a

very spiteful member of the 'great person's' family, made a deep impression upon Lady Moffat.

She reflected about it very earnestly; she unconsciously worked out a rule-of-three sum in this wise: given that the world would have thought so much evil of the grand lady's sin, what would it think of hers? Where would it place a woman who, her husband being still alive, had lived with another for years, and then— No; she would not pursue that inquiry any further. Perhaps, after all, Sir John had been right not to accept a higher title; the world, the great world, seemed full of people given to prying and poking into affairs which were no concern of theirs.

Lady Moffat might not be clever,—indeed, in many things she was most intensely dull; but she had wit enough to comprehend the creed held by Miss Banks and others of the same genus, viz. that the only unpardonable crime is to be found out.

If Mr. Seaton could have gone on cheating and swindling and extracting money from the pockets of credulous clergymen and foolish governesses and silly widows, not a tongue would have wagged against

him. If a man chose to break every commandment so long as he could escape the law, people were willing to welcome him. Vice was not vice in some persons; dishonesty lolling back in its carriage was quite a distinct thing from dishonesty creeping on foot and breaking into dwelling-houses, and picking pockets in a poverty-stricken sort of fashion. All she had to do was to keep her own counsel, and she might go on to the end successful and prosperous, unless, indeed, anything most unforeseen occurred. But nothing would occur; she told herself that often. She felt quite satisfied she was safe, though one night she found herself sitting up in bed panting with the horror of an awful dream oppressing her; and on another occasion, when she was seated quite alone on a bench in Kensington Gardens, she could have declared she heard the name 'Palthorpe' uttered, though there was not a creature near she had seen before in all her life.

'I am not well,' she decided; and this was true.

'I shall get strong after I have been out of town a little,' she went on; which remained to be proved.

Up till quite recently her health had been won-

derful; but the change to Palace Gardens and the life she led there did not seem quite to suit her. She appeared to dread solitude; a fiercer restlessness than even her youth had known began to evidence itself. She was never happy save when on the move—driving, visiting, walking, and receiving visitors. She did not sleep well; her appetite grew fanciful and capricious; but she felt certain change of air was all she needed.

The air of Scarborough, a place she had never yet visited, but of which her new friend gave most glowing descriptions, would, she declared, effect wonders; so when once the season was over to Scarborough she repaired, and her sons and her youngest daughter and her maid and Miss Banks went with her.

CHAPTER IX.

A LONELY MAN.

If spending money could purchase health, Lady Moffat must speedily have found herself restored to perfect strength. There was a beautiful monotony about her letters which Sir John failed to find altogether pleasing. 'Do not forget the cheque.' 'Be sure you send a remittance by return of post.' 'I was much disappointed at not hearing from you to-day. I have not five pounds left.' 'I shall require another order by Wednesday at latest.'

No matter how wealthy a man may be, the eternal iteration of pecuniary demands becomes after a time trying to his temper. Sir John was rich and generous; he had never been one to inquire, when he gave a sum of money, how every halfpenny of it was disbursed; but at the same time, if he were strong in anything, it was in prudence; if there were one trait more pronounced than another in his nature,

it was that of a keen and comprehensive business intelligence. He had known how to make money, how to take care of it, how to add to it; and it was a simple impossibility for a man to have been at the head of a large and solvent business for years, and at length fail in a capacity which should enable him to grasp the reasons for any expenditure which seemed to him excessive.

He had not the slightest intention of being ruined through any domestic extravagance. He knew well enough that many commercial adventurers not merely permit, but encourage, a lavish expenditure in order to what is called 'maintain credit,' and 'keep the ball moving;' but it was not for Sir John Moffat to follow suit in such an evil game. A quiet style of living, the comfort which springs from living well within an income, the satisfaction that arises from being able to give without feeling pinched in consequence, the sense of right in knowing children will not be left unprovided for —all these things, and these only, had seemed hitherto desirable in his eyes. Wild profusion, wasteful management, mad hospitality, shocked

his feeling of propriety as well as his common sense.

In permitting a ball to be given, he had not intended his house should witness such a gathering as assembled under its roof; in allowing his wife to go to Scarborough, it never occurred to him she would run the pecuniary muck on which she had evidently started.

'I shall have to stop it,' he thought, after looking over his private account, and adding up the various sums he had forwarded, which amounted, indeed, to a most formidable total. 'I think I had better take Yorkshire on my way to Lancashire, and see what they are doing. She has never given me any trouble of this sort before, and I am loth to speak about it, more especially as she is out of health; but I am afraid Palace Gardens has turned her head a little. She forgets, poor soul, and she mistakes; and I have my doubts about that Miss Banks.'

He had to call in Great George-street; so he took Westminster on his way back from the City, and walked thence home slowly through the Parks.

In former days he had not been over fond of Nature; business then supplied all the charm and change he wanted; but now, time and sorrow having taught him to feel the soothing expression the face of the great mother ever wears to those of her children who are weary of the world's hard ways, heart-broken to find the toys they have striven for valueless now they understand their paltry worth, there was nothing he loved so much as a quiet stroll beneath the trees, when the lights and shadows fell tenderly on the grass. How many a time had he not thought of his own wasted life as in the winter days he walked beside the darkling water in St. James's Park, and wondered in the spring-time whether in another world he would ever look upon such a season without mournful memories, without the tears of repentance dropping down in his heart, with the certainty that the stains of his sin were washed from his soul, and the assurance that his remorse had not been all in vain, and the atonement he had striven in all humility and with bitter grief to make was accepted!

God knew that to him the fruits of sin had been

bitter; that the typical Dead Sea apples were not more surely mere dust and ashes than the so-called happiness of fulfilled desire. Since that first morning, when in the early twilight he looked upon the woman who was his partner in wrong, though not in misery, he had never known a day's real peace or comfort.

The world had prospered with him; the world often does so prosper with men otherwise miserable; but underneath the robe of affluence, closer to his heart than wife might ever nestle or child creep, lay the stinging scorpion and the gnawing fox.

In the dust he had trampled the honour of a man who trusted in him; on his soul, he felt, lay the death of one who had done him no evil, and yet to whom so much evil had been done, it was, he knew at the time, a relief to feel he could come back no more.

Sir John walked on! what a mockery that title, the esteem in which his fellows held him, the respect he received, the honour paid to what the world called his strict probity, his unswerving rectitude, seemed! Ah, how far away lay that time when he

had been somewhat of a Pharisee; when, though conventionally calling himself vile, he really believed he was very good—not as others, not as that wretched publican, not as the woman divinely bidden 'to go and sin no more.'

That was all past and over; he had learned to be very humble and also to be very pitiful. He knew now what temptation meant, and what yielding to it involved; he did not still think that with eyes wide open a man always walked straight into the pit of sin; he comprehended the weak resolves, the blinded vision, the stumbling steps which so often precede the final fall. He himself had traversed the descent so gradual and so easy, that it is only when the height from which he started is looked back upon through blinding tears the wayfarer understands the depth of degradation into which his erring feet have led him.

This man, who had trodden the downward path, no part of which was for him strewed with flowers, gazed on that summer evening, while he walked homeward, all abroad over his life. What had he made of it, what had his own act brought him?

The sad gravity of the worn face, the wistful melancholy of the kindly gray eyes, told their story without need of further word.

He possessed riches, he had achieved position; those whose good opinion was to be prized spoke well of him; he went through the world with no external mark of the fire that had consumed his honour and destroyed his peace; he was considered a fortunate man; his labours in the cause of philanthropy were remembered, and his fellows extolled his name. In rounded sentences oratory had rolled forth panegyrics on his unselfishness, his liberality, his Christianity; if he were to die, he was sure preachers would refer to the loss of one foremost in every practical work of charity, and tell in touching language how his left hand scarce knew the number or value of the gifts his right delighted to bestow; and yet he knew, he and his Maker, that he was not happy, or fortunate, or content.

He knew that even the love which sometimes makes the burden of sin seem almost light had never been vouchsafed to him; that ice was not colder or the barren rock harder than the woman

for whose beauty he had bartered away self-respect, hope, virtue; he knew that whilst taking all she could give nothing, for the simple reason that she had nothing to give; no tenderness of heart, no grace of soul, no loveliness of mind, no instinct of understanding. It had been all loss; throughout no gain came to him. In his case the wages of sin had indeed been death. Looking back, looking with his mental eyes on the darksome road he had traversed, the while his outward vision ranged over leafy trees and rippling water, and joyous children shrieking with delight as stately swans came onward to where they stood, he was aware that no glamour of love, no light of hope, no faithful friendship had offered the smallest compensation for the failures sustained. By his hearth no fond woman had greeted his return, from his windows no sweet face had watched for his coming; there had been no one to speed him onward to victory, to console him when disappointed, to sympathise with his success.

All loss, all loss; all thorns, no roses; fair to look upon till touched, and then the leaves lay scattered on the earth; sweet to the lips, bitter in the

mouth; not even so much of pleasure as generally precedes pain; not even the sunshine before the storm.

Throughout, through all the long years, all the days and hours and minutes of his weary repentance, but one thing had brought him the faintest happiness, and that often seemed merely but one link in his long chain of punishment—Rachel.

As a child, as a girl, now when she was almost a woman, her love for him had been infinite. From the first she took to him; her baby heart, wrung at being torn from those who had loved and tended her, turned for consolation to the man by whom the separation was wrought. Her eyes—so like—so like the father she had never seen—were lifted full of tears in trust to a face which possessed no beauty to attract, no smiling wiles to beguile.

A stranger amongst strangers—for the first who passed along the street would have felt more kindly towards the tiny creature than her own mother—she aroused the pity and woke the love of a man lonely and desolate as herself. He had meant to be just to her, but no more. He had meant there should

exist no difference between her and his own children; he intended her to be fed, clothed, housed, educated, dowered, as though she were his daughter. He said there should be no distinction made, she should be called by his name, provided for by him; and he had done all this and more.

Though her baby face often awakened the bitterest memories, though the touch of her little hand seemed sometimes heavy to him, as if it were laid on his in accusation, though her laugh often sounded painful to his ear, she had grown to him; she had twined herself around his heart-strings; he looked for her when he came home at night, he never turned away from the kiss her rosebud lips pressed against his cheek ere he departed in the morning. He was jealous about her and watchful; he would have her considered: no matter what befell the other children, Rachel must not be neglected.

He saw the antipathy her mother had conceived for her, and he interposed between them, so that no harshness might fall on the little one; that, though helpless, she should be preserved from harm.

And she returned to him what he thus sowed a hundredfold: the thought, the care, the gratitude, the tenderness, the comprehension his wife had never showed, this girl lavished upon him with a prodigality which many and many a time brought an aching remorse to his heart, and recalled memories he would fain have laid at rest for ever.

Between himself and the other children there was but the ordinary affection that in most cases subsists between parents and their offspring; but with Rachel the matter was different. She possessed a nature unlike any of her brothers, unlike her sister also: she had a power of intuition, of sympathy they entirely lacked. Her ways were not theirs, her thoughts were otherwise ordered. She was graver than any of them and more observant, less selfish too, and gifted with a higher species of intelligence.

He could not have lived through all the years without her, he often thought, unknowing how many a one has to continue his weary pilgrimage along the world's highways without the slightest reed to lean on; and yet there were times constantly recurring

when he considered with affright that if she knew all, if her innocence could understand so terrible and shameful a story, he would behold the love-light fade out of her sweet face, and see her shrink away from his side in an agony of sorrow.

He was beginning to realise a time must come when she would have to be told at least that she was not his child. At first when she was a mere infant, and the idea of loving and lovers remained an indistinct idea in the misty shadows of a remote future, this trouble had not presented itself.

She might never marry—thousands of women never married, never wanted to marry, never were asked to marry; he might die, her mother might die, she might die. So many mights and buts and ifs and possibilities were on the board when her life's game commenced, that it seemed useless to speculate concerning a mere probability many parents are so eager to consider a certainty. But now the case was very different: she was quite grown up; she would marry, he felt sure, or at all events she would be sought in marriage. He had known this with all the power of sudden conviction from the day he told

her mother he hoped she never would be wooed nor wed. When he bought the house in Palace Gardens he felt he was taking an important step towards a bitter end; but he did not mean to hesitate on that account. Once the subject was forced upon him—and it had been so forced by his wife, whose motives in thus doing happened to be far different from any which could have influenced him—he gave the matter his most earnest consideration.

The girl could not be shut up in a nunnery. If such power had lain with him, Sir John would not have exercised it. She must be introduced to society, and then, whatever consequences followed, he could only face one by one as they presented themselves.

None save those able to sympathise with the shy reserve, the unpretending modesty, the retiring temperament of this man, who, even if all things had gone well with him, would always have preferred a life of quiet domesticity to the throng and bustle of an existence passed amongst crowds, can even faintly imagine what this determination cost; but he accepted it as he accepted many other things, as a

matter of duty, in the execution of which he had no choice.

He could not offer expiation to the father; but it was competent for him to try to make the daughter's life happy. At whatever sacrifice to himself he resolved to keep that aim steadily in view.

'I will do my duty by Rachel, whatever comes,' he thought; and thus it chanced even ordinary acquaintances remarked,

'Though the eldest, she is the Benjamin in that family.'

'It is strange Sir John seems to consider her so much more than he does his sons.'

Strange indeed!

But then they did not know, they never knew. Sir John was thinking about her as he wended his way homeward. While he walked slowly under the trees in Kensington he wondered how long the evil day would be deferred, when and where she would meet her fate.

'Heaven send,' murmured the sad heart, 'he may be an honest man, and one not disposed to think the sins of the parents should be visited by

poor humanity upon the heads of the children. Other girls have married well, other girls whose mothers—' and he drifted out again on that sad gray sea, the waves of which were always ebbing and flowing around his life, rolling ever over the sands, and washing memories of the long-ago, like corpses on the shore.

He felt very weary when he reached Palace Gardens; dull, and tired, and out of sorts. As he glanced up at the stately house, at the long lines of windows, he wondered what wealth had done for him, what wealth did for any one, that men should so court its possession.

He had beheld more happiness in the old manse lying amongst the hills, in modest homes set far away from riches and fashion, than it was ever his lot to meet with in the world's high places.

Passing even through the meaner streets of London neighbourhoods, where his business rarely led him, he remembered how the children ran to meet their parents, how mothers took little dirty bundles of humanity to their bosom, and kissed the smudged and smeared faces which were lovelier to them than

if they had been little lords and ladies dressed in all their best.

He recollected one night following up Cheapside a man and a woman who must have attracted his attention mightily at the time, for he never subsequently quite forgot them.

The man was a tall, long-limbed, loose-built fellow—a navvy probably—at all events one who evidently gained his living not by the exercise of skilled labour, but at the cost of downright hard work. He was dressed in his working clothes; was returning home, very likely, after a day of physical toil. The woman was a small slight creature of his own rank, clad likewise in her every-day apparel: a cotton gown, an old plaid shawl, a straw bonnet that had seen service: a husband and wife who, no doubt, at times knew what the pinch of poverty meant, but who were not poverty-stricken.

Most likely they never had possessed five pounds at one time in their lives; it seemed almost certain they never could own such a sum. Amongst well-dressed well-to-do people they pursued their way in silence, not stopping to look in at shop-windows,

not passing remarks on the sights which met their eyes—the throng of vehicles, the rush of pedestrians; for Cheapside was then a much more busy and attractive thoroughfare than it is now—they passed along, considered of no account; not regarded by the people they met, but still *hand in hand.*

The sight produced a deep impression upon Mr. Moffat—he was not Sir John at that time. The incident recurred to his memory as he turned in at the gates of Holyrood House.

Not all his money had been able to purchase for him anything like that. He remembered a book some one gave to his sister when she was a girl, called the *Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man;* and he dreamily thought there was more truth in the double title than many people imagined. He walked up to the door and put his key in the latch, and was about to turn it in the wards, when the lock was opened from within; the door swung slowly back on its hinges, as if by its own volition, for no one appeared on the threshold or in the hall; then a head was thrust cautiously out from behind, a pair of bright eyes sparkled with delight at witnessing

his astonishment, a peal of rippling laughter broke the silence, two soft white hands clasped him round the neck.

'Why, Rachel!' he cried, in astonishment.

'Like a bad shilling, papa.'

'My dear, when did you come home?' he asked.

'Half an hour ago, papa.'

'And why?' he continued, still utterly lost in amazement.

'They have got scarlatina down at Ferndale,' she explained, 'and would not let me stop. I wanted to stay and help—it is poor little Flossy—but the doctor said no; and O, papa, I was so thankful to find you were still in town! We shall have one delightful evening all alone together at any rate.'

'Ever so many if you like, Rachel,' he answered, his face reflecting a little of the sunshine she seemed to have brought into the house with her. 'I will not go to Lancashire now at all.'

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF TOWN.

At Scarborough Lady Moffat was enjoying herself greatly, after a joyless, dissatisfied, discontented fashion. She found herself all at once that which she had certainly never been before at a watering-place—a person of some distinction.

Miss Banks at once instituted herself as leader, decided where they were to stay, what they were to do, the things they were to see, how they were to amuse themselves. There, as in Kensington, she knew tribes of people; all good—not, perhaps, in the City sense of the slang phrase, or in the meaning unsophisticated persons might be inclined to attach to the words, but in the cant of society. They were 'quite the best'—'in a right rank'—ladies and gentlemen it was 'more than safe' to know; being assured of which facts upon so sound an authority, Lady Moffat was graciously pleased to

express the pleasure she felt in making their acquaintance.

Miss Banks had an eminently simple plan for enhancing the greatness of those she called friends; she multiplied their possessions by five. It was not too little, and she found it not too much. Thus if a man were the happy owner of an estate bringing in two thousand a year, Miss Banks said his rent-roll was ten; if a girl had a *dot* of ten thousand pounds, Miss Banks remarked that, with her fifty thousand, she ought to marry well. In these cases, however, she had some basis of fact upon which to erect her superstructure of fiction. The Moffats were in a different category. Sir John might be worth a million, or worth a million less than nothing. She did not know anything of his affairs, and Lady Moffat could not enlighten her.

'I know nothing of business,' said that admirable person, 'and I have never been in his office in my life.'

'Just like poor dear Mrs. Seaton,' said Miss Banks, with an approving and appreciative smile; but she thought:

'How wonderful it is that all these women, who are dependent upon trade for the bread they eat, and the wine they drink, and the luxuries they enjoy (and where could any one find women able to command so many?), not merely profess to feel indifferent, but actually are indifferent, to the source whence the money on which they live is derived!'

'Sir John is reticent about such matters, I should imagine,' went on Miss Banks aloud, after a pause.

'He does not talk about the City, if that is what you mean,' answered Lady Moffat; 'but then, to be sure, he knows I should not understand him if he did.'

'I often notice that gentlemen who are enormously wealthy do not care to speak about their money; and Sir John, no doubt, is very wealthy indeed.'

'I can't say, I am sure,' answered Lady Moffat. 'I think he must be, though. He was rich when I first knew him, and he must have been getting richer every day since then.'

Here was a golden opportunity, and Miss Banks pounced upon it as a City Arab might on a sovereign.

Never before, never once, had Lady Moffat alluded to old times.

'Where did you meet him first?' she asked, in accents full of tender interest. 'At some charming place in the country, no doubt; or perhaps when you were abroad. I have heard of so many happy marriages that have come about from people getting to know each other under circumstances where the shackles of this weary social bondage under which we all groan are relaxed.'

Lady Moffat looked at her friend curiously. If the subject had been capable of forming a theme for mirth, she must at that moment have felt amused, so eager was Miss Banks for information, so transparent was her ruse in fishing for what she wanted to obtain.

But the matter chanced to seem the reverse of mirthful in Lady Moffat's eyes. She felt conscious she had made a slip, and hastened to retrieve it.

'I met my husband in London, Miss Banks,' she said, so coldly that any one save the irrepressible spinster must have been frozen into silence.

Not so Miss Banks.

'Law,' she said, 'in London! You can't mean it! And I would have wagered my best brooch you were born in the country.'

'You would not have lost your bet,' answered Lady Moffat, that slow sullen fire kindling in her eyes. 'I was born in the country; but still it so chanced that I met Sir John in London.'

'Up in your teens to see the lions, I suppose?' suggested Miss Banks genially.

'No; I did not see any lions, or come to see them,' retorted Lady Moffat. 'I was staying in London with a relative.'

With a relative! Good Heavens, how close Miss Banks was to the scent! If she could only have guessed the degree of kindred, what a mine she might have sprung in Palace Gardens! As matters stood, half the earth could not have separated her more widely from the mystery than was the case. 'Ah, here comes Edwina!' cried Lady Moffat; and next moment that young lady, in a yachting costume and wearing a sailor's hat, under which her hair was tossing wildly, entered the room.

'Good gracious, child!' cried Lady Moffat,

'where have you been, and what can you have been doing?'

'Running after a gentleman's hat, mamma,' answered the girl, her cheeks all aglow, her eyes sparkling, her lips parted.

'O my *dear!*' said Miss Banks, in mild expostulation; in fact, Miss Edwina's ways and manners were dreadful to her.

'What a tomboy!' exclaimed Lady Moffat, but not reprovingly: not having studied *les convenances* for so many years as Miss Banks, the full enormity of Edwina's conduct failed to strike her. Moreover, she was proud of her daughter's beauty, and she was often not sorry to hear the hits that decided young person dealt her new friend.

'I and the boys were on the esplanade enjoying this fine breeze,' explained the girl, turning to her mother, and ignoring Miss Banks' remark as completely as though that lady had not been present; 'there was scarcely another creature out besides ourselves, when we met a gentleman in a bath-chair drawn by a person who looked like a servant-man. Just as we passed, a gust of wind caught his hat,

and off it went. The man began to run, and Gilbert began to run, and Ralph and Hal ran, and then I ran; but the hat ran faster. You never saw such a race! The servant gave up first, and then Gilbert, but Ralph and Hal and I kept on, and I caught it. I was proud, I can tell you. Hal took it back to the gentleman; and he thanked him and laughed, and said it was the best spin he had ever witnessed.'

Lady Moffat laughed also; but Miss Banks groaned.

'Don't you think, Edwina, you are rather too old for such exercises?' she asked.

'No, Miss Banks, I do not,' she answered; and walked out of the room with her chin well up in the air, and her nostrils quivering a little with passion.

'The idea!' she said, as she closed the door after her.

'She is such an impulsive darling!' observed Miss Banks; 'and when she is excited, as she was just now, she is the very image of you, dear Lady Moffat.'

'Yes, she is like me,' agreed her ladyship.

'So different from that sweet quiet Rachel.

Whom does she take after? There is scarcely a look of you about her, and she does not in the least resemble Sir John.'

'No, she is not like Sir John,' answered Lady Moffat; 'I suppose she casts back.'

'Where does she cast back to?' asked Miss Banks—'Sir John's side of the house?'

'O, no, certainly not to the Moffats,' said her mother hurriedly, and with some irritation.

'How stupid I am! I might have known that,' said Miss Banks softly, and in a tone which implied that, whatever other merits Sir John's family possessed, beauty could not be reckoned among them. 'Perhaps she resembles your father?'

'Possibly,' agreed Lady Moffat. 'I do not remember him; but he had, I believe, blue eyes and light hair.'

She spoke indifferently, but she shivered. She knew whose blue eyes looked at her once again out of her daughter's face, whose sunny hair had clustered thick on his forehead, even as the little waves and crinkles lay caressingly on that of his only child.

'Was your mother as beautiful as you?' asked Miss Banks innocently. She was devoured with a desire to know who Lady Moffat's parents had been, and why her ladyship's name was not even mentioned in that book which may be well called the 'secular Bible.'

Lady Moffat's cheeks burned. Miss Banks was getting very near a mystery now—one with which even Sir John was not acquainted. Brusque in her frankness as her ladyship was and had always been, she knew how to keep her own secrets, and consequently never informed her husband she resembled her mother in other respects besides appearance.

'She was very handsome.' The words were nothing, but the manner was something.

'Pray do tell me about her,' exclaimed Miss Banks. 'I am sure she must have been charming.'

'I do not remember her at all,' said Lady Moffat.

'Died so young. Dear me, how sad!' cried the other sympathetically.

There was a pause—just the merest pause, a shifting glance in Lady Moffat's eyes, a nervous

twitch of her mouth—and then she answered quite composedly,

'I lost both father and mother when I was quite a baby.'

'Poor child!' murmured Miss Banks.

Lady Moffat opened her lips to say something, and then shut them again.

'I wonder when luncheon will be ready,' was the next observation she vouchsafed; 'really this sea-air makes one dreadfully hungry.'

At luncheon, however, Miss Banks noticed she ate very little, but drank two glasses of wine, quite an unusual thing for her to do; for she did not much like wine, and had hitherto not led a life of such excitement as was likely to cause her to have recourse to either sedatives or stimulants.

In the afternoon Lady Moffat complained of headache, and went to lie down. Edwina, as usual, started out with her brothers. Miss Banks, left alone, began to think. Any one coming into the room would have imagined she was merely knitting quietly, counting her stitches, and absorbed in her work; but the lady's mind was otherwise engaged.

'What in the world is queer about that woman?' she asked herself; 'there is some secret in her family history, which I wish I could find out. However, it won't do to ask any more questions, I see that plainly. I have made her fidgety already. I never met any one like her before, so shrewd and so dull, so sharp and so stupid, and with such a tremendous love of power. Well, let Sir John be what he will, I should not think he has found existence with her ladyship a bed of roses.'

And at that very moment Lady Moffat was wearily wishing she had not asked Miss Banks to accompany her to Scarborough. 'I do not like her so much as I thought,' she decided. 'She is too fond of meddling—she is a poking, peering, prying, ugly old maid.'

Next day, however, an event occurred which induced both ladies to sink their differences. Walking slowly in the forenoon along the shore—Edwina, fresh from her dip in the sea, following in their wake, her hair streaming down her back, and a huge dog, with which she had made friends, greeting her with frantic demonstrations of joy—the sun shining

brightly upon the sea, still somewhat wave-tossed after the summer storm that had swept over it the previous day—they came upon a bath-chair drawn aside from the bustle of the sands, in which, sheltered by a jutting rock from the heat of the early noontide, sat an invalid, accompanied by a gentleman friend, and attended by a servant, who, now his assistance could temporarily be dispensed with, stood a little apart.

Miss Banks, looking at the tableau carelessly, suddenly uttered a little exclamation of surprise, and bowed to the stranger leaning against the rock, who raised his hat in acknowledgment of her salutation.

Then the eyes of the gentleman in the bath-chair falling on Miss Edwina, he recognised her, and moved as if by an irresistible impulse he smiled, as he also lifted his hat.

Half laughing, while blushing, feeling in a moment shy and abashed, the girl returned a wise little nod, and hurried on after her seniors.

They had not got twenty paces away, however, before the gentleman Miss Banks knew was at their side.

'Forgive me, dear Miss Banks,' he began; 'but I no sooner see you than I come to ask a favour. I had no idea you were in Scarborough.'

'I have been here a fortnight, Captain,' she answered, stopping; 'and you?'

'Two days.'

'What delightful weather!' remarked Miss Banks.

'What a nice day yesterday was!' he answered.

'I never crossed the threshold of our hotel,' she said.

'Nor I,' he replied. 'But that brings me back to the question I wanted to ask. Who is that jolly little girl?' and he indicated with a look Miss Edwina, who was walking demurely beside her mamma, and shaking out her tresses to the sun and air.

'That "jolly" little girl is the daughter of Sir John Moffat,' explained Miss Banks, in a tone of severe reprehension.

'By Jove! and who is Sir John Moffat?'

'Really, Captain, I am afraid I cannot add further to your information,' answered Miss Banks stiffly.

'Come, Miss Banks, you must not be cross with me,' said the individual addressed as Captain; 'and you used always to be so good-natured and forgiving! Are you angry at my calling your young lady a jolly little girl? Fact is, I only adopted the Viscount's phrase. He was so taken with her yesterday; he talked about her at intervals all the evening; and now nothing will serve him but an introduction, if it can be managed. You will humour his whim, won't you? Remember what a wreck he is.'

'You forget,' said Miss Banks, not much appeased, 'I am as much at sea concerning your Viscount as you about Sir John Moffat.'

'Why, I thought you knew all about him; you used to be hand and glove with some of the Chesunt people, I am certain.'

'Do you mean that that man in the bath-chair is Lord Chesunt?' asked Miss Banks. 'Why, I thought he was abroad—gone abroad to die!'

'He is going abroad,' answered the Captain; 'but I don't think he will die just yet. If he could be roused, if his interest could be awakened, if he could by any means be persuaded he is really a very

fortunate individual, I think he might be well enough. Failing all that—' the Captain paused and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Miss Banks did not speak; she knew when to talk and when to keep silence.

'Now, won't you manage,' entreated the Captain, 'to let him know that child? Upon my soul, Miss Banks,' he went on, waxing desperate, 'I do think she has done him good already. How he did laugh, to be sure, when he was telling me about the three of them scurrying along after his hat! "What a jolly little girl she is!' he said. "What a delightful little woman she will be!" '

Miss Banks had thought it all out by this time. She did not like Captain Battersley. There had been between them, in days gone by, certain little passages of arms, in which she always came off worsted. Dangerous as a friend, fatal as a foe, she had for many years tried to keep a wide distance between herself and the gallant officer; but in the present instance she knew it would be of no avail trying to elude his request. By hook or by crook he

would compass his design, and it was better to bow to the inevitable and to make a virtue of necessity.

'You had better,' she said, therefore, 'tell all this to Lady Moffat herself. She is a very amiable person.' Miss Banks made this statement without the suspicion even of a smile. She told untruths as a matter of business, and the humour of some of them never struck her. 'As amiable as her husband is rich. It is extremely likely she will take the child back to speak to his lordship now.'

'A thousand thanks,' cried the Captain. 'And so,' he added, as they hurried along, 'this Sir John Somebody is very rich, is he?'

'Sir John Moffat is very rich indeed, Captain Battersley,' answered Miss Banks.

'And where does he live when he is at home?' asked the officer.

'In Palace Gardens,' said Miss Banks.

'Where is that?' inquired Captain Battersley.

'I declare you are too bad!' retorted the lady; and, dexterously shifting the position of her sunshade, she turned her gaze seaward, utterly exclud-

ing the offending Captain from her bodily contemplation.

'Why, what now?' he asked. 'What have I said or done amiss? You seem to think I am as well posted up in the new baronets and new localities as yourself. I know all the old streets as I know all the old titles, but when you take me beyond my radius, I am lost. Where is, or are, Palace Gardens?'

'You know perfectly well,' she answered irritably.

'I do not know,' he said. 'Anywhere near Palace-yard?'

Miss Banks did not reply. They were now close to Lady Moffat and her daughter, who paused as they drew near.

'May I introduce Captain Battersley to you, Lady Moffat?' began Miss Banks. 'He is a friend of the gentleman whose hat Edwina and her brothers rescued yesterday.'

The Captain bowed and told his story—gave a pathetic account of the state of Lord Chesunt's health, and of the boon any distraction from the consideration of his ailments proved to the sick man.

'Will you allow him to make your acquaintance?'

he entreated. 'He has taken a fancy for knowing Miss Moffat, and he is just like a child—frets if one crosses his whim. I feel that I ought to make a thousand apologies for preferring such a request; but if you take into consideration the exceptional circumstances of the case, I am sure you will forgive me.'

Lady Moffat had no objection in the world to knowing Lord Chesunt; quite the contrary. Lords had not been plentiful in her world—indeed, she had never spoken to one in all her life—and the opportunity presented seemed far too good to be lost. She wanted to know people of high degree; she was restlessly anxious to increase the number of her desirable acquaintances. The society she once thought very grand and good she now despised. She desired to go on climbing higher and higher, believing that in some yet loftier sphere she would attain that happiness she had never yet compassed, and feeling if there were not security in the society of the upper ten, safety existed nowhere on the face of the earth.

'I shall be very happy to become acquainted with

Lord Chesunt,' she said; and though there was no elation in her tone or manner, there was a sparkle in her eye, which the Captain read correctly. 'We know his cousin, I think;' which was a bold statement, since she had only spoken twice to that gentleman.

Captain Battersley laughed.

'You mean the clergyman, I suppose,' he said. 'That fact had better, I fancy, be kept discreetly in the background. The mention of his cousin acts upon my friend like a red rag on a turkey cock.'

'Why?' asked Lady Moffat, with charming directness.

'People do not like their next heirs, as a rule, particularly when they themselves happen to be in bad health,' he answered. 'It is annoying to reflect another fellow will come in for a lot of good things if you die. And though Chesunt will not take care of himself, he can't endure the idea of anybody stepping into his shoes when he has to leave them off. Therefore, I venture to suggest that, his cousin being an unpleasant subject, the topic should be avoided.'

'You hear that, Edwina,' said Miss Banks severely.

'Yes, I hear,' answered the girl; and, looking at her, Captain Battersley knew she meant to introduce Mr. Woodham's name the very first opportunity which presented itself.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE GRAND HOTEL.

THE acquaintance thus begun was not permitted to languish for want of constant intercourse.

Staying at the same hotel, Viscount Chesunt spent a great portion of his time with his new friends; and when he did not feel inclined for their society—for he had moods of evil temper and seasons of terrible depression—Captain Battersley kept the ball moving, and made himself, as Lady Moffat said, 'very agreeable indeed.'

That gallant gentleman admired Sir John's wife immensely. 'A splendid woman!' he declared to Miss Banks, who was not backward in repeating all his compliments to her hostess. 'Her beauty is imperial,' he said. 'I do not know when I saw any one so handsome! Where did the worthy knight pick her up?'

Miss Banks did not answer. She knew the covert

insolence which underlay these figures of speech, and she had no weapon save silence to keep that insolence from finding open expression.

'I beg your pardon,' he apologised; 'do you happen to know where Sir John Moffat met with his wife?'

'I do not,' answered Miss Banks.

'Yet you have a faculty of finding out most things.'

Again Miss Banks vouchsafed no reply.

'There is a mystery, I take it,' he went on.

'I have not the faintest idea. Why should there be a mystery?'

'Why should there not?' he answered.

'What makes you think there is?' she asked.

'Can't tell; there is something about her I don't understand. Come, Miss Banks, what is it? We know each other so well, there need not be any secrets between us.'

'There is no secret at all, so far as I am aware,' she answered.

'Really?' he asked.

'And truly,' she replied. 'She is not very com-

municative about her antecedents; but then that is nothing unusual with people who have risen.'

'They have risen, then?'

'She has, I fancy. Sir John's family connections are respectable enough.'

'Never seen any of her relations?'

'Never. Nor of his, for that matter.'

'Who was she?'

'I don't know.'

'This grows interesting,' commented the Captain. 'Fancy Miss Banks living on terms of intimate friendship with a lady for— How long have you visited with them?'

'Six months, I suppose.'

'And at the end of that time knowing literally nothing of her antecedents. I could not have believed it! Lady Moffat must be cleverer than I thought.'

'She is not at all clever,' said Miss Banks.

'Ah, that's a woman's view of the matter, just as it is a female delusion that Chesunt can be secured for the little girl. My dear soul, it is of no use trying to play a game of that kind with him. He is not

going to marry; and if he were, he would not marry our boyish young friend. You see, she could bring him nothing but money, and he does not want money. She is pretty; but, good gracious, there are hundreds of pretty women in the world, and in his own rank too. You are making quite a mistake. Of course, it is no business of mine, and I only tell you because it always seems to me a pity for persons to waste time. You had much better go in for the cousin. Ah, I see that idea has already occurred to you. Sir John's money-bags could be useful to him, and he has a very good chance of the title, though he may have to wait some time for it.'

'I suspect you do not want Lord Chesunt to marry,' said Miss Banks, who could not resist giving this tit for his tat.

'I? You don't suppose, my dear soul, I am going to lead this life of slavery for ever? Thank you. My berth is no sinecure; and what is worse, it is not profitable. The wrong sort of person, my lord, to get much out of. It makes no difference to me whether he marries or stays single; but he won't marry. He never cared for any woman but one;

and, unstable in everything else, he remains faithful to that first love who was faithless. Not even to spite his cousin will he take a wife.'

'What a singular idea!'

'Isn't it? He must have been devotedly attached to her. It was a boy-and-girl affair; but you know all about it, of course.'

'No, not all. Of course every one is aware he was disappointed, but I never heard particulars.'

'They were neighbours, I believe,' explained Captain Battersley. 'You remember he was poor as a church-mouse, and had not, in his younger days, the slightest hope of ever succeeding to the title or the property—a very ineligible fellow indeed. He had known her from a child—they had grown up together; she was the only person, he says, who ever understood him, and they were undoubtedly very fond of each other. Her parents would not hear of the match; nevertheless, the young folks vowed to be constant, and he went abroad with his regiment and she stayed at home. The first news which greeted his return was that she had married, and the next that he was Viscount Chesunt.'

'Where is she now?'

'In India. Her husband is an enormously rich fellow. He was ordered to England for his health: saw her, proposed, was accepted. So much for constancy.'

'And what is really the matter with Lord Chesunt?'

'A very prosaic disease—he drinks too much. The doctors say he can't last if he goes on as he has been doing, and I am striving to keep him straight, but it's not an easy task. Now you have a map of the country, my dear Miss Banks.'

'I thought there was something of the sort,' she said meditatively.

'If you lived with him you might be sure,' answered Captain Battersley. 'It is a perfect madness while it lasts—a wild insanity. He is better, though—he is decidedly better; and I am in hopes living abroad may do wonders for him.'

'He is going abroad, then, certainly?'

'Yes, in a few weeks' time. So, you see, there is not much chance of catching him for that audacious little romp.'

Miss Banks did not feel satisfied on this point, but she held her peace.

The days went by, and Captain Battersley grew quite intimate with the Moffat family. The Viscount had one very bad attack, and while he was confined to his own apartments his friend came and went to the rooms occupied by Lady Moffat and Miss Banks as though he were one of that party.

'Don't she and her husband agree?' asked the Captain, who really admired Lady Moffat immensely, and felt most curious about her.

'He seems to let her have her own way in everything,' said Miss Banks.

'Why doesn't he come to Scarborough, then?'

'I fancy he has enough of her at home.'

'Then they do quarrel? I felt sure of it.'

'No, they do not quarrel; but she is a restless woman—I daresay you have noticed that; and he is so quiet, I think it must wear him a little.'

'What is he like—mentally and physically, I mean?'

'He is many years older than she, and looks his age. He is grave, reserved, gentleman-like; says as

little as he can avoid; does not care for display or society or amusement. He is not ambitious. It is much easier to say what he is not, than what he is: a good sort of person, I think, but not easy to get intimate with.'

'Rich, you say?'

'Enormously, like all City folks.'

The Captain laughed. 'I know some fellows in the City who would be only too glad to find themselves even a little rich; but let that pass. Now what do you suppose this good Sir John will give his daughter? A hundred thousand?'

'I can't tell; that is a great deal of money. Say half.'

'Well, we will say half. I might do worse myself;' and the speaker looked straight in Miss Banks' face. 'What do you think?' he added, finding she made no reply.

'That she might do a great deal better,' answered the lady boldly.

'True, I don't dispute the correctness of that statement; but still, think the matter over; give the subject your best consideration.'

Miss Banks gave the subject her best consideration as she walked homeward, and decided it would not do; indeed, she had her misgivings that the Scarborough business, so far as she was concerned, must be regarded as a complete mistake.

Save change of air and free board and lodging, she had gained nothing by her expedition. A few useless presents, a few revived acquaintanceships—what were these to set against the fact that she was getting dreadfully tired of Lady Moffat; that she felt she was a woman of whom little could be made directly—who has 'no gratitude and no sense,' thought Miss Banks; 'who is as secret as the grave, and as mean at heart as a miser'?

Lady Moffat was not the person to give her purse into the hands of any one and say 'Pay.' She liked power; she loved personally to feel what money could do for her. Miss Banks could lead her into extravagance, but she never got a chance of levying blackmail ere the gold, which was poured out like water, reached tradesmen, who were as greedy and hungry as herself.

'I think I must soon receive a letter requiring

my return to town,' decided Miss Banks; and having made up her mind on this point, she redoubled her attentions to Lady Moffat, and rendered herself most amiable and attentive.

One beautiful morning Lady Moffat, Miss Banks, and Captain Battersley all sat talking pleasantly over a late breakfast. It had come to be almost a matter of course that Captain Battersley should join them at that meal, which now was always late.

Lady Moffat could not sleep at night, and was getting into the habit of taking her rest after dawn. By this time she had plenty of acquaintance in Scarborough, and was leading that life of constant gadding and useless visiting, certain to tell upon the health of a woman who had hitherto led the most quiet of existences, and kept the most regular of hours. Her doctor had not the faintest idea as to what was the matter with her, and therefore said she was to pass a considerable time in the open day, and keep herself interested and amused, and free from all anxiety.

Nothing loth to carry out these directions, Lady Moffat, aided and abetted by Miss Banks and the

many 'delightful' people who chanced by the 'greatest good fortune' to be at the same period staying at Scarborough, was ever foremost in projects for pleasure, and in suggesting parties, aquatic and otherwise.

She was not very fond of the water, it is true, but, as she remarked, 'anything is better than staying indoors.'

They were a merry party at breakfast on the morning in question. Lady Moffat often declared Captain Battersley amused her more than any one she ever knew. He had never a good word to speak in their absence about man or woman; perhaps this was the chief reason of his agreeability.

They were talking very earnestly about a picnic-party Lady Moffat intended to give. Miss Banks was pencilling down the names of those who should be invited, and Captain Battersley was diversifying the monotony of that proceeding by comments upon the different persons mentioned. Young and old, merely rich or merely well-born, good and bad, handsome and ugly, it was all the same to this well-dressed, easy-mannered cynic.

'You are too hard upon them,' said Miss Banks at length, in expostulation, when, after pulling a whole family to pieces, he reverted to the shortcomings of a respectable old grandfather, whose only sin chanced to be a too small acquaintance with foreign tongues, and an undue fondness for pronouncing French and German and Italian names in 'plain English fashion,' which was, he said, 'quite good enough for him.' 'They are very nice homely sort of people, and I do not like to hear them ridiculed.'

Captain Battersley looked at her steadily. He was short-sighted, and the glass he wore almost constantly fixed in his right eye made the scrt of scrutiny with which he favoured the lady more impressive.

'Good gracious,' he exclaimed, 'can I believe my ears? Is Saul amongst the prophets?'

'I do not think it is a sin for a man who was born about eighty years ago to be a little ignorant of modern languages, if that is what you mean,' said Miss Banks stoutly. 'People were not in the way of learning so much, then, as they are now; besides,

when he was young he had not time, I daresay, to study such things.'

'I daresay not; at that remote period I think he told me he was employed as a sweeper—could it be a sweeper? yes, I think so—in a cotton-mill.'

'All the more credit is due to him, then, for having risen to the position he occupies.'

'I will not endeavour to dispute so obvious a truism,' said Captain Battersley, bowing. 'There is no knowing where to have our fair friend,' he added, turning to Lady Moffat. 'She blows so hot and she blows so cold. One day she is enthusiastic concerning the merits of a new acquaintance; the next she discovers he is but mortal, and blames him for failing to reach the stature of a saint. Now it seems to me a middle sort of course is better, for if one sees both the defects and the virtues—'

'Better leave out the last word,' suggested Miss Banks; 'you never see a virtue.'

Lady Moffat laughed; she liked to hear the two sparring; it never occurred to her that between them she might get a blow—that either could ever find aught but good to say of a person whose com-

pany they appeared so much to enjoy, whose society they so sedulously affected.

'Do you think your friend will be well enough to join us?' she asked.

'Who—Chesunt? O yes, I'll make him come; he is like Miss Banks, he loves "fresh woods and pastures new." The grandpapa's account of his foreign tour will delight him beyond measure. Shall we proceed with the list?'

'I think it is almost long enough,' said Miss Banks, looking pensively at the names she had jotted down. 'Just attend for a moment whilst I read, and then if there is any one, any desirable one, that you find I have omitted, please tell me.'

'Sir John Moffat.'

It was not Captain Battersley or Lady Moffat who supplied this omission, but the waiter, who threw open the door of the breakfast-room and announced Sir John Moffat.

If a ghost had appeared suddenly before the trio they could scarcely have been more startled.

Miss Banks dropped her pencil. Captain Battersley surveyed the new arrival in amazement.

Lady Moffat half rose from her chair, and then sat down again, murmuring,

'Why, how did you come here?'

It was not a cordial welcome, but it served. Sir John shook hands with his wife and Miss Banks, bowed to the unknown gentleman, and said he had come by the train from York.

'Have you breakfasted?' asked her ladyship.

There was plenty of material on the table for any one who liked cold coffee, cold tea, cold toast, cold bacon, cold eggs, fruit and wine.

Sir John had breakfasted.

'Lovely weather for travelling,' said Captain Battersley, plunging into the conversational abyss.

Yes, the weather was beautiful, Sir John admitted.

'You know Scarborough well, I suppose?' suggested the Captain.

No, Sir John had never seen Scarborough before.

'Ah, well then, you will see it for the first time at what people think its best. I prefer the place in the winter, I must say, however. I am going out

shortly, Lady Moffat; is there any commission I can execute for you?'

Lady Moffat was obliged, but she wanted nothing.

'And you, Miss Banks?' asked Captain Battersley, turning towards the spinster.

'No; I am going out almost immediately myself, thank you.'

'I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in the course of the afternoon, Sir John,' said Captain Battersley politely, turning to that gentleman; and without waiting for any reply he left the room, an example followed so speedily by Miss Banks that they encountered each other on the landing.

'Surprised?' asked the Captain.

'Well, yes, a little.'

'She looked frightened.'

'But she isn't; it is only a way she has.'

'She acts the part very well if it is not natural.'

Meantime the subject of these remarks sat with the sunshine streaming upon her, perfectly silent. She looked at the wrecks strewing the breakfast-

table, the remnants of that pleasant feast, the places where her two guests had sat, and spoke not a word.

Sir John's eyes also roamed over the board, and then turned to the sea dancing and quivering below the windows, before he said slowly,

'Who is that person, Mira?'

'That person,' she answered, with not a bad imitation of the officer's own manner, 'is Captain Battersley.'

'How did you get to know him?'

'Through an accident,' she replied slowly and unwillingly, as though the words were drawn out of her mouth against her inclination. 'He is here with Lord Chesunt.'

'You see a great deal of him?'

'Yes, we have grown very intimate with them both.'

'O!' and he drew a long breath, and began studying the pattern of the carpet.

'Have you any other question to ask?' she said, after a moment's pause.

'Yes;' there was a latent insolence in her tone, but he took no notice of it. 'We had better have

these things removed first, however, so that we may not be interrupted.'

'We can go into the next room,' she said; 'you need fear no interruption there.'

She led the way, her skirts sweeping the ground, her head upreared in the air in a manner all too familiar. He knew these signs betokened stormy weather; but he had not come down expecting a calm, and he was prepared for any outburst which might ensue.

'Will this suit you?' she asked, with a scornful glance around the luxurious appointments.

'Very well,' he said; and drawing up an easy-chair for her, he stationed himself beside the window.

'You want to know what brought me down, I suppose?' he began, speaking quietly and gently as usual.

'Yes; and why you came as you did—without letter, without warning, bursting upon me like a thunderclap, just as if you wanted to spy what I was about.'

He looked at her in calm astonishment.

'No thought was further from my mind, Mira,' he said. 'I am not, I hope, much in the habit of spying and prying.'

'O indeed! yet the moment you come here you begin finding fault with my acquaintances.'

'I have not done so as yet,' he replied. 'Still, while we are on that subject I may tell you I decidedly object to Captain Battersley and to Lord Chesunt. They are both men of the worst possible character; and if you must make new acquaintances, I should prefer them to be respectable.'

'You are a judge of that sort of thing, I suppose?'

'Mira,' he said, 'don't let us quarrel; we are not, we never have been, too happy; but surely there is no necessity for us to make ourselves more wretched. I did not come down here to speak about Captain Battersley or Captain anybody. I came merely in answer to your letter asking for more money. Do you know, have you any idea, how much you have spent since you left London?'

'I am not a bookkeeper,' she retorted.

'I ought to have seen you sooner on this sub-

ject,' he went on, his voice very kind and low and pained, for he hated having to find fault, and he could not endure talking to her about her sudden extravagance; 'but as I was willing until lately to give you even more than you asked for, since I considered you were, as wives go in these times, moderate in your expenditure and careful in the household, I thought I would send all you wanted while you were here, and then tell you before another summer came round I could not afford so large an amount.'

'Well?' she said, as he paused.

'I meant to have come down long ago,' he said, 'and then I put the evil day off and off. I wrote to you some time since, if you remember, and begged you not to ask me so constantly for remittances. For a little while you refrained from doing so; but of late scarcely a day has passed without a request for money.'

'Because you never sent me enough at once,' she answered.

'Well, altogether you have had enough surely,' he expostulated. 'Just look here, these are the

sums I have posted to you; that is the total they come to.'

He held out as he spoke a little memorandum-book, the first leaves in which were well filled with figures, while the page he kept open showed a formidable amount to have been drawn in so short a time out of the pockets of any man.

She averted her head and began tapping the floor with her foot.

'Do look at it, Mira,' he entreated. 'I do not like to seem stingy; but your own common sense will tell you, if you cast your eye over those figures, that I could not, in justice to myself and the children, allow such an expenditure to continue.'

So suddenly and swiftly she struck the book out of his hand that, as he bent towards her, it smote him in the face and then fell to the floor.

He did not say anything; he lifted it up and put it in his pocket, and then walked twice up and down the room before he could trust himself to speak again. Ah, he could not take his hat now, as he had done in the years gone by. He was bound to her, and he knew it. Through the long, long weary

years, by words, tone, manner, she had reminded him too often of his position for there to be much danger of his forgetting it.

Yet there may come a time when even a worm will turn, and that time had arrived for Sir John. As she meant to fight, he would fight. Warfare of any kind was not to his taste; but he felt that if he ever intended to defend his worldly credit, his mercantile honour, the money he had struggled hard to amass, the fortunes of his children, the portion he had mentally set aside for Rachel, he must unfurl his standard now. He had arrived meaning peace, and she met him with enmity. He had approached a difficult subject with reluctance, and she treated it and him with scorn. He had not intended to reproach her for the past, but only to curtail her expenses for the future; and she rejected his first offer of some reasonable capitulation, she received his flag of truce with indignity, and gave him no reason to suppose that any further amicable advances would be treated with greater courtesy.

He stopped at length in the middle of the room and looked at her. She was still gazing out of the

window, still ignoring his existence, still, with her face well in profile, keeping her eyes averted from this disturbing presence.

Yes, he looked at her; coldly, dispassionately, critically. She was handsomer than she had ever been—as different as can well be imagined from the beautiful creature he first beheld; but in her prime more lovely, more perfect than even when she stood with the glamour of youth and romance and dawn about her, and the thousand nameless attractions imagination weaves round a pretty woman when her story is still unknown, her faults lying in the background far out of sight of the keenest eyes.

He had seen handsome women since he first met her in the dim twilight of early morning, with the scent of roses and lilies filling all the air, but he had never seen one so handsome as his wife. He had roamed through exhibitions, and sauntered through picture-galleries; but not in one did he ever light on a portrait of any lady so divinely fair as she who had brought all the hopes and aspirations of his life to naught.

How long had the passion he once dignified by

the name of love been dead, he wondered? He could not think of it now save as a snare and a delusion, an infatuation and insanity; but looking at her he marvelled wherein the charm had lain for him, what there was in the song which lured him to destruction.

He could not tell; though she was still a beautiful woman, her face attracted him no more. With the years there had grown a dread of it. Very little further provocation would, he felt, change that dread to hatred. With all his heart and all his soul he had tried to do his duty by and to her. For her sake, for that of the husband he had wronged, for conscience' sake, and the truth and the right and the honour, he had been more tender to, more thoughtful for, this wife who had never been thoughtful for him, than husbands usually are to wives they nevertheless hold dear in their innermost hearts, that they love wholly and entirely.

And this was the return he received. Knowing what she knew, remembering things which *could* not be forgotten, she still let the demon with which she was cursed, rend her, and defy him.

She wore a morning dress that was a master triumph of simplicity, fashion, and expense, and he noted how its every line and flow, its delicate colours, its pretty bows and trembling ribbons, set off the fairness of her fair face, the graceful curves of her figure. White and lovely were her hands, shaded by creamy-looking ruffles; her hair was thick and luxuriant as of yore; not a wrinkle marked her forehead, not a trace of Time's footprints could be seen upon her face. What was there she had lacked in the past? what was it she desired in the present? Were there not hundreds of women, thousands, millions, who would be thankful for a twentieth part of the money he was willing she should spend? And why should he hesitate about speaking firmly and with authority when he recollected the poverty wherein he had first seen her, the obscurity from which he knew she had sprung?

He did hesitate, however; partly because he recollected so fully, partly because he disliked and feared a scene.

He knew the fury of the devil which possessed her; he had seen it throw down all reticence and

self-respect, and trample on everything a man holds most sacred; he dreaded beholding it let loose, more especially in a strange place, and amongst strange people, who might, perchance, have never seen such a tempest of rage as rarely disturbs the proprieties of modern domestic life.

Still the question must be raised, the matter, if possible, settled; and having so decided, he returned to the spot he had occupied previously, and recommenced his argument.

'I used to imagine that statements about a man being ruined by his home expenditure were the purest of fictions—that is by home expenditure, unless he himself elected to keep open house and live in a wildly extravagant manner.'

She did not turn her eyes from the sea, or move her position even by the sixteenth of an inch; but she laughed.

Now when amused by Captain Battersley, or flattered by Miss Banks, Lady Moffat's laugh was not disagreeable; but on such occasions as the present it sounded intensely unpleasant. It was a short sneering laugh, like an exclamation or an in-

terjectionary comment, and was capable of expressing at once contempt, ridicule, defiance, and anger.

Sir John was well acquainted with every modulation of that laugh. It had not seemed to him so dreadful when she was another man's wife — perhaps then he had heard it less seldom; but since the doubtful happiness was his of calling her his own, the sound of it was to him what the war-whoop of the Indian might be to a peaceful settler in the backwoods.

Nevertheless he held steadily on.

'But it is quite evident to me now,' he proceeded, 'that a person might become seriously embarrassed, or at least deeply involved, without being in the slightest degree aware of the fact. Since we entered Holyrood House, independent of the cost of alterations and furniture, and entirely exclusive of what may be called ordinary household expenses, we have spent something like nine thousand pounds.'

'And I daresay you have often made nine thousand pounds in a day,' she said.

He smiled; though she was angry and he vexed, he could not help smiling.

'Indeed no, Mira,' he answered. 'Mine is not a speculative business; there are no great gains in it, as there are no enormous risks. Never in a day, never in a week, and but once, so far as I remember, in a month, did I make even half the sum; but that is quite beside the question. I cannot afford to live at the rate we have been doing. No moderate business would stand it; and the sooner we revert to a more modest and economical style of housekeeping, the better it will be for all of us.'

'I never again intend to live on cheeseparings,' answered her ladyship, with a little fluttering hurry, which caused the ribbons on her dress to tremble and stir as though they too felt emotion.

'When you are asked to do so,' he said, 'it will be time enough for you to refuse, will it not?'

She turned her head now and looked at him. She placed a white hand one on each arm of the chair, and gazed in his face, with the evil light of old smouldering in her eyes—lying there, as Doctor Dilton said, like lightning within a cloud.

'We may as well understand each other,' she began. 'Till quite lately I never knew how rich

you were; or, indeed, that you were rich at all. If my sight had not been opened I might have gone on for ever grubbing along, managing and contriving while you were enjoying yourself out in the world; making yourself a great person; giving to your Lancashire operatives and London poor; dining with your earls and your lord mayors, and the Queen, for aught I know to the contrary. But I will do it no longer. Life is not so long one need waste any part of it. For years and years I have been kept mewed up, seeing nothing, knowing no one, going nowhere. If I do not take some pleasure out of existence now, I shall be an old woman before I have a chance of ever feeling I was a young one.'

'What have you lacked that I could give you?' asked Sir John.

'What have I had? would be a better question,' she retorted. 'Till just lately have I ever had the chance of visiting or going about like other women? I was not taken with you anywhere. When you were at dinner-parties I was at home with the children. I thought it a treat to go to tea at the Rector's. Your money was no advantage to me. I

wore dowdy dresses because I knew no better. I went on foot, though you could well have kept your carriage long ago; and now when, no thanks to you, an opportunity presents itself for enjoying life a little, you come down and tell me you won't have it!'

'And I will not,' said Sir John, as he stood, looking grim and gray, confronting his beautiful wife, who had risen in her passion, and seemed now in the bright sunlight a visible embodiment of Fury. He was quite firm; pale, but resolved; grim, but determined. 'I will not,' he repeated; 'I *won't* have it!'

Then she broke out; the paroxysm was sure to come. Under the circumstances it could no more be kept back than a fit of epilepsy, no more be controlled than an outburst of smallpox. She scolded, she stormed, she raved; the only marvel seemed she did not assault and murder; and then she swept out of the room, knocking down a chair, and sweeping a cloth off the table in her progress.

It was over; the storm had come and gone, and Sir John stood living and alone. No worse tempest had ever threatened to annihilate him, and yet he

was in safety and scathless. This was what he had done for himself; this was what he had commenced to compass on the morning when he walked due west.

Time had blunted the first terror such hurricanes evoked, but could never reconcile him to the domestic climate where they might be expected.

He knew now if there were one thing on earth he would have valued more than another it was a happy fireside, where peace sat tranquil, where some dear woman smiled to see him return, where some kindly face brightened at his approach as it could brighten at the approach of none other upon earth.

But it was not to be. Early enough he had not considered the quality of the grain he was sowing. At first he had not reckoned it would cover all the fields of his future, and that the harvest it yielded would require the best years of his later life to garner into the granaries he had built.

Half unconscious of what he did, he picked up the chair she had overturned, and carefully replaced the cloth, smoothing out its folds with unaccustomed hands as he laid it on the table. An onlooker might

almost have guessed something of the man's nature from the way he strove to conceal all trace of his wife's wild paroxysm of passion, to hide the evidence of her temper, to keep strangers from knowing she had permitted herself to be so disturbed. The books that had fallen with the cover, the nicknacks lying scattered on the floor, the vase filled with flowers, which had not broken, though the water contained in it was spilt,—all these things Sir John rearranged as best he could; and then he went back and stood by the window, looking out over the sea dancing in the sunlight, his heart heavy in his bosom the while—heavy as lead.

He felt determined, but he was sorrowful; and as he watched the bright beams glittering on the surface of the ocean, and thought of the man who had been swallowed by the waves, and whose requiem was sung by the winds and the billows, his very soul sickened by reason of the past which lay behind and the future which spread before him.

Ere long the door opened, and Edwina looked in, searching for her mother.

'Why, papa, who would have thought of seeing

you?' she cried, running to him and flinging her arms round his neck. Then she held him at arm's length, and made believe to be incredulous. 'It is papa after all. And how are you, papa, and how is Rachel? You have not brought her, I am afraid, have you?'

'No,' Sir John said, 'I have not brought her; but she is very well. We have been Darby and Joan, you know, together for ever so long.'

'Dear old Joan,' murmured the girl. 'Where is mamma? You have seen her, of course?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I have seen her; but I don't know where she is now.'

'I'll try if I can find her,' exclaimed Edwina; and she left the room, only to return in a couple of minutes, and say with a pout, 'Winter' (Lady Moffat's maid) 'told her mamma was gone out, dressed all in a hurry, and left word she might not be back until dinner-time.'

Having vouchsafed which information, Miss Edwina went and drummed in an absent and unladylike manner on the window-pane, while her father stood looking on.

Miss Edwina's *personnel* did not exactly please him. He was not given to study his feminine belongings as regards their attire over critically or carefully, but the effect of his youngest daughter's appearance grated upon his sense of fitness.

Her dress was too short, her boots were too thick, her ankles too visible. She wore the sailor's hat before mentioned, and besides the bodice of her gown she apparently wore nothing over her shoulders. Externally she certainly did not, save a cloud of hair tossed and untidy, wild as the mane of a colt just taken in from grass, crazy as that of Ophelia after she had stuck sticks through her dishevelled tresses.

In silence Sir John contemplated the young lady. Always a hoyden, she seemed to him at that moment a wilder hoyden than he had ever before imagined. Always wanting in repose, she looked then storm-tossed and weather-beaten. Sunburnt almost beyond credibility, her blue-striped costume stained and discoloured with grubbing amongst the sand and being splashed with sea-water, her hands brown and gloveless, her collar soiled, her cuffs limp and tossed,

Miss Edwina certainly appeared an anachronism in that state of life in which she was placed, and the fact forced itself upon her father's attention.

'Wina,' he said at last, after he had exhausted every defect in her dress and manner and listened to the tune she was discontentedly drumming on the glass till he felt its inconsequence irritating his already irritable nerves, 'how long would it take the maid to pack up your things?'

She had turned towards him and ceased her musical exercises at the sound of her name.

'Not long, papa. Why?'

'Because I am going to take you back to town with me.'

She flushed scarlet. Through the sunburn and the freckles he could see the blood mantling her cheeks and mounting to her forehead. There was one thing, however, Sir John's children knew—namely, that when he spoke to them he meant to be obeyed. He did not often speak; but if he did so, there was no appeal.

'Very well, papa,' she said resignedly. 'Shall I tell Winter now?'

'You had better,' he answered. 'I want to start as soon as you can get ready.'

With a crestfallen and humiliated air the girl took her short dress, her thick boots, her streaming hair, her sailor's hat across the room. At the door she paused.

'Papa,' she pleaded, 'mayn't I have something to eat before we go? I'm so hungry.'

He did not feel much inclined for merriment, but he could not help smiling at the rueful tone in which she spoke.

'Don't make yourself uneasy, child,' he answered. 'I have no intention of starving you.'

Still very sorrowful, but with that one ray of comfort breaking athwart the gloom, Edwina betook herself to Winter; whilst Sir John, left alone, rang the bell, and ordered luncheon; and then, searching about for writing materials, began and finished a long letter to his wife.

By the time he had ended luncheon was announced, and Edwina, dressed for travelling, came down, and did ample justice to the viands. Half

an hour later they were on their way to the railway-station.

'Should you like to see York?' asked Sir John of his daughter, who was still depressed, though no longer hungry.

'We stopped there as we came down, papa.'

'Then you do not care about breaking our journey for the night?'

'No, papa.'

'You would prefer going straight through to London?'

'Yes, papa.'

'You do not think it will be too much for you?'

'O no, papa.'

Such conversation was not likely to beguile the way, and Sir John felt pleased when he found the train was pretty full, and that they were not able to secure the privilege of a compartment to themselves. It was the same all the way. If one passenger or set of passengers alighted, others at once stepped into their vacant places. He bought some books and papers, and shared them with his daughter, who looked first at a paper, and then at a magazine, and

then dipped into a book, till she grew tired and went to sleep. Sir John also indulged in a nap; and thus, with a cup of tea at Peterborough, and a few remarks interchanged with their fellow-travellers, they got through the time, and when it was very late arrived in London, hired a cab, and drove to Palace Gardens.

The master of that household had not been expected to return until the following day, and Simonds manifested some surprise at sight of him.

'Miss Moffat has not gone up-stairs, Sir John,' he said; 'she is in the library.'

But already Rachel was in the hall.

'Why, papa,' she cried, 'have you come back so soon? and Wina! I never expected to see you. Aren't you well, dear?'

'Yes, quite well; but so tired.'

'Then will you go straight to bed at once?' asked Rachel, with a little trouble in her face, for she thought there must be something wrong.

'Yes, that will be best,' said Sir John, answering for the girl.

CHAPTER XII.

A HAPPY HOLIDAY.

During the whole of his married life Sir John Moffat never passed so peaceful and pleasant a month as that which succeeded Rachel's return from Surrey. He had never known what it was to have a home which he did not almost dread to enter. After living on the edge of a volcano, the quiet and the companionship which he found in Holyrood House were unspeakably pleasant. Though at times the sight of Rachel's smiling unconscious face, the thousand little tender cares she showed him, the winning charm of a manner which owned its crowning grace to an utter and total forgetfulness of herself, hurt him by recalling the face and the heart and the manner of the man he had wronged; yet, as he watched her slight figure flitting about the room, as he marked her girlish beauty developing into the loveliness of womanhood, as he listened to her sweet

voice and marked all her kindly gentle ways, her thoughtful charity, her swift sympathy, her easily-aroused compassion, the calm contentment of her mind, he thought that, could the dead man behold his child, whom he had never even seen, he would be satisfied, and feel that so far as in him lay Sir John had tried to make her good and happy, had striven, through his anxious watchfulness on her behalf, to offer some atonement for the sin committed such a weary time before.

She was a delightful companion too; she had so many strange little byways of thought, that the old well-trodden roads of life assumed quite a new character as she diverged hither and thither into pleasant green lanes bordered with sweet fancies and decked with flowers culled out of the depths of her own imagination. She was not afraid either of venturing down the darker paths that, both in thought and speech, we are all too apt to shun. The doubts that perplexed her, the troubles people had to encounter which seemed so inexplicable, the mysteries of sin and grief and wrong-doing and punishment, the excuses which might be made for wickedness—

how hard it seemed for some to do right, knowing from their nurseries, the streets, and their cradles, the gutter, nothing save evil—she would talk of all these things reverently, though sorrowfully, and marvel, as, God knows, all who see the world and are perplexed by its contradictions must marvel, why such things should be.

Her deep faith, her earnest piety, her religious feeling, pure as that of a saint, strong as that of a martyr, seemed to Sir John little short of miraculous. He had believed, with many another, that the lore which surpasses wisdom could only be learnt at a mother's knee; that the lispings of prayer, the aspirations of mortality to the immortal, were never taught perfectly save by a woman striving to guide her child's first steps heavenward; and he knew, none better, that of that higher knowledge which transcends all human device and contrivance his wife was as ignorant as any child dragged up in heathenism in the midst of a Christian land.

He ventured one evening to express something of this feeling to the girl, to wonder who had been her instructor, from whom she had heard so much

of the vexed problems of man's existence, of the deep unspeakable goodness of the Lord and Maker of all.

Rachel laid down her work, a pretty delicate cob-webby piece of lace she was making for her mother, and looked across at the questioner through a mist of loving tears.

'Who taught me?' she repeated. 'Why, you, papa. Don't you remember the Sunday afternoons and the long summer evenings, and our walks through the green fields, and the Bible-stories you told me, and the pictures you conjured up of the people of olden time as we passed through the ripening corn or sauntered beside the river? Why, if I were to see Palestine to-morrow, it could not seem to me more real than it has done to me often and often in imagination.'

He had not recollected this; it came upon him with the shock of a thankful surprise; such a tiny grain of mustard-seed, such a tree to afford shade and shelter in the wilderness of life!

'And you preached little sermons too, papa,' she went on, smiling, 'without knowing it, I am

sure, in the least. Only a sentence or so; but they sank down into my heart, because I used often to wonder as a child what you meant by them and why you spoke them. I came to understand in time. You know I could not help seeing—'

She stopped; for he covered his face with one hand, and stretched the other out as if to put some haunting sorrow aside. And yet it was not all sorrow. Surely, surely there must have been some comfort in the thought that his own bitter had produced such sweet as this; that so fair a soul had been perfected by the teaching of his own sin-laden conscience; that the disunited household had shown her nothing save the patience which may spring from grief, the forbearance a man can show when a woman tries his temper and wrings his heart.

The more he saw of the girl, the more he found to admire. She was so wise as well as loving, so discreet, so pure, so guileless. She had read a great deal, and as they sat or walked together, as they lingered over tea, or sauntered in the twilight on the terrace, she brought out her little stores of knowledge for his amusement—scraps of modern

poetry, fragments of ancient ballads, the thoughts of men who had lived hundreds of years previously, strange morsels of biography, whole paragraphs her retentive memory had retained.

Yes, it was a happy time, and a quiet. He knew a storm must come, but he refused to think of that, or to hasten to meet it. He did not go down to Scarborough then, as he had intended; he wrote to his wife, and asked that the amount of her expenditure might diminish; and he tried to believe that, though domestic matters had been going very wrong indeed in Palace Gardens, he should not have any trouble on that head in the future.

He greatly disgusted Mr. Simonds by inquiring from him the names of all the tradesmen who had helped to make the great ball such a success, and sending to each a request that his bill might be furnished immediately.

'There is nothing of what I call a generous profusion about Sir John,' Simonds remarked to a friend. 'He is uncommon fond of having value for his money;' which, if Mr. Simonds could only have believed the fact, is not an unusual trait when people

have had to work hard to obtain that money for which they require value.

Sir John got in most of the accounts, and drew his own conclusions from them. He did not go out of town, but 'mooned,' as Simonds observed, down into the City for a couple of hours most days, and then mooned back again, either to take Rachel on some excursion or to sit in the library till the heat of the afternoon was over, when he and she sauntered into Kensington Gardens, and walked through the almost deserted park, to the confusion and indignation of the whole establishment.

'And everybody but themselves out of town,' said Mrs. Larrup, in hot ire. 'If I was gentlefolks, I'd be ashamed to be seen.'

Which, indeed, was a feeling shared in by every domestic in the house, from Mr. Simonds to the scullery-wench.

'They oughtn't to do such things,' said the butler; 'it's compromising.'

Whatever it might be, however, the pair enjoyed that time; delighted in the brightness of the summer days and the soft coolness of the evenings.

Almost in the twilight they were sitting in Kensington Gardens, about a week after Rachel's return, when a gentleman passing by stopped, and spoke to them. When he first raised his hat Sir John did not recognise who it was, but as he came nearer he remembered Mr. Woodham.

'I had no idea you were in town,' said the clergyman.

'We are the only two left,' answered Rachel softly.

'Not quite; I am left also, as you see.'

'But perhaps you are here only by accident,' she suggested.

'And design,' he replied. 'I did not care about going away,' he added, addressing Sir John. 'Indeed, I had nowhere to go that offered the slightest attraction; and the vicar was glad for me to stop. My mother is out of town, so I am quite alone.'

'If you enjoy your loneliness as much as we do ours,' said Sir John, 'there is no need to pity you.'

'Ah, but your case is widely different. Yours is a solitude of two; mine of one.'

Perhaps it was for that reason he stayed beside

them for a little time, and walked with them past the old palace and out of the gateway and up the road to Holyrood House.

'Will you come in and have a cup of tea?' asked Sir John, not much expecting the invitation to be accepted; but Mr. Woodham availed himself of it eagerly.

After that they often met him in their rambles; and Sir John invited him to dinner, and Rachel played plaintive airs and sang sad low songs while he and his host sat in the half light of the mysterious dusk, looking dreamily out into the garden, while the perfume of all sweet flowers came floating into the room.

A happy, happy time; sweet placid days succeeded by calm nights; dreams that had in them no calculation, no thought of an awakening. Life seemed flooded with sunshine; the river of existence, over which they softly glided, seemed so smooth, so glassy, they never thought it was flowing to the wide sea from which there is no return, carrying them with it.

'The parson is coming after our young lady,'

opined Mr. Simonds; 'trust him for knowing on which side his bread is buttered.' But no thought of that sort had as yet entered into the parson's mind, neither had such an idea entered into the imagination of Sir John. He looked upon all priests of the order to which Mr. Woodham belonged as celibates. It certainly never occurred to his mind a Ritualistic clergyman would one day ask him for Rachel.

If at first he felt himself a little out of his element when Mr. Woodham and the girl were talking, it was only because they spoke of matters in which he did not take much interest.

Essentially a man of his own day, Sir John was unable to get up enthusiasm concerning those who in the past made London famous; and as he listened to Rachel's eager questions and listened to Mr. Woodham's replies, he wondered people living in a world full of present facts and hopes and failures could completely identify themselves with a period so remote that to his thinking the mists of time had gathered around and almost obscured it from sight.

Still he was very glad Rachel should be thus amused. He wanted her thoroughly to enjoy her quiet holiday. He desired nothing for himself save the satisfaction of feeling her hand resting within his arm; of seeing her face seek his for sympathy; of hearing her talk afterwards of all she had been told, and weave her girlish fancies around the old red-brick palace, and relate again the scenes that had been enacted there.

By degrees, however, he too insensibly began to take a deeper interest in the history of the old court suburb, and found himself commencing to understand the sort of dual life persons whose minds are well furnished from the storehouses of the past may lead in even the newest and least promising of neighbourhoods. In a vague inconsequent sort of fashion, for instance, he would sometimes find himself wondering what Kensington—now a mass of streets, gardens, places, squares, shops, mansions, palaces—looked like when the whole district was one vast marsh formed by the overflowing of the Thames. Once he was able in his mind's eye to see that great tract of land covered by water, just as

the country round Chertsey and Shepperton and Halliford and the lower parts of Weybridge are covered in wet seasons now, it did not seem impossible for him to conceive of the Forest of Middlesex stretching away northward, and Notting Barns being, even in the time of Henry VIII., 'mostly covered with wood.'

He imagined the loneliness of the whole country when the Roman road from London to Staines ran through Turnham Green; and then his thoughts travelled far away to that wonderful nation, then the pioneers of civilisation and conquerors of the world, who lost their prestige after a period of luxury and slothful self-indulgence, which finds unhappily its significant parallel in England at the present hour.

Where, in Kensington, did Linacre the learned plant the first damask rose? What lots of roses have come and gone since then! The useful cabbage likewise, which seems so much part and parcel of every cottage-garden that it is difficult to imagine it not indigenous to British soil. Looking at the market-carts upheaped with that vegetable which

lumbered slowly and heavily along all the western roads, it seemed strange to think of cabbage having been 'introduced' by Sir A. Ashley; as strange as when noticing costermongers' barrows piled high with firm white-hearted lettuces to consider that not so very remote period when a messenger used to be sent over express to Holland to fetch that salad for the Royal table.

Ay, and he thought, too, of the human interests that had been active about the neighbourhood, the intrigues which held for their centre the old brick palace, and twined in and about the kings and queens dwelling there.

From William to Victoria: why, it seemed but a few years since, under the first, Sir Christopher Wren designed and commenced the alterations necessary to change the house from an earl's residence to one fit for a king, a period scarcely more remote in the narrative than the account of a young girl being called in a moment from privacy and a life of the utmost simplicity and retirement to govern 'a greater diversity of kindreds, tongues, and people

than were ever before assembled beneath the sway of a single sceptre.'*

But a few years; for the ingathered harvest

* Here is a passage which contains an account of the proclamation 'given at our Court at Kensington, this 20th day of June 1837,' being read at St. James's Palace: 'The 20th of June 1837 will be a day long remembered by those who had the good fortune to witness the singular, beautiful, and affecting spectacle of the proclamation of our beloved sovereign. In the centre stood the youthful monarch, suffused in tears, and almost overwhelmed by the tremendous responsibilities of her situation, from which, however, she obtained a very apparent relief in the hearty cheers of her sympathising and loyal people. H.R.H. the Duchess of Kent stood a little to the right of her Majesty, and was observed to watch with an anxious eye the regal bearing of her illustrious daughter. The President of the Council (the Marquis of Lansdowne) was on her Majesty's right hand, and the First Lord of the Treasury (Viscount Melbourne) on the left. Close behind were most of the members of the Cabinet, the Lord Steward and Lord Chamberlain of the Household, the Earl Marshal of England, with other illustrious persons.

'In the courtyard beneath, opposite the window, were the band of Household Trumpeters and Sergeants-at-Arms, whose duty it was to attend the proclamation of the sovereign in the various parts of the metropolis. In front of the soldiers were an immense assemblage of persons, principally ladies of distinction, who vied in every demonstration of loyalty and devotion. Silence having been obtained, Clarencieux King-at-Arms (Sir William Woods), attended by four pursuivants (Portcullis, Rouge Croix, Blue Mantle, and Rouge Dragon), made proclamation.'

seems ever small when compared with the stretching uplands of adventurous deeds and the wide-spreading valleys of quiet husbandry, where the grain which lives in history was scattered and harrowed and tended, watered by the blood of men and the tears of women, ripened in the sunshine of brave deeds and glorious self-denial, guarded from the tender green blade to noble maturity by the vigilant care of a race who love freedom and respect the law, who have fought for God, their king, and their country as every capable man in the land would fight again, did need arise for him to buckle on sword and issue forth in defence of hearth and home, his liberty on earth, and his hopes of heaven.

It was well for Sir John to learn from the pages of antiquarian research something of the men and women who had fretted out their little day, and were forgotten by all save a few students of the olden time. He laughed sadly sometimes to consider how much better in reality as well as in the proverb is a living dog than a dead lion; how much more, for instance, to be considered by the modern inhabitants of ancient Chenesiton any upstart who

could waste his doubtfully acquired wealth in the maddest extravagance, than he who fought the battle of Protestantism at the Boyne, and who wore to the day of his death, cold though he has ever been considered, bracelets made of Queen Mary's hair, that wife who lay in state, spite of having died of small-pox, at Whitehall from the 27th of December till the following March, constantly attended by her people.

On the 5th of March she was buried, when the 'biggest bell in every cathedral, collegiate, and parochial church in England and Wales tolled from nine to ten in the forenoon, and from two to three and five to six in the afternoon of the same day. The funeral was attended by both Houses of Parliament, a rare mark of respect.'

During the time Sir John and Rachel were alone in Palace Gardens he read *Esmond* by her particular desire, but she could never discover that the story or the characters had particularly aroused his interest. For Lady Castlewood, he said quite honestly, he did not care at all. Fact is, looking at her quite dispassionately, he arrived at the conclusion she was

a weak, jealous, silly woman, who had been in love with Esmond almost from the first; whilst as for Beatrix, perhaps he had known too much of a woman not wholly unlike her in character, though born in a different rank and destitute of Trixy's charms of manner, to care much for the story of how she deceived every one and came to shame and grief at the end. But Rachel loved the book, and took especial delight in that part where Esmond gives up his birthright, and consents to bear his burden in patience and silence, because he was grateful and loyal.

No matter, however, who had lived or who died, who suffered or who rejoiced at Kensington, Sir John at length found he must not let the sweetness and quiet of that rare holiday prevent his going to Scarborough, and facing the scene he knew he must expect.

There had only been a lull in Lady Moffat's demands for money, but the pecuniary storm had now recommenced with greater violence than at first.

'I must see what it all means,' decided Sir John.

When he returned from his journey he did not

feel much enlightened as to the causes of the late heavy drain upon his purse; but he knew he had done a prudent thing in speaking out his mind, and italicising his utterances by bringing Edwina back to town.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS BANKS TRIUMPHANT.

GREAT was Lady Moffat's dismay when, upon her return to the hotel, she found her husband had gone and taken Edwina with him. Never before in all their wretched married life had he acted with such self-assertion. If he had remained, any display of authority must have only incited her to further rebellion; but she could not argue with an absent man. He was already far on his way to London, and Edwina with him. She did not throw aside the letter he left for her, as she had refused to look at the manuscript book he offered. No; she felt frightened; she read every word it contained, and when she reached the last paragraph drew a long breath, relieved to find matters were no worse.

Miss Banks was soon in possession of what Sir John did say. Nay, more; ere the evening was over she had perused the letter itself. As she read she

felt that if ever she hated one woman more than another that woman was Lady Moffat.

Good heavens! If she had not been as foolish as she was disagreeable, into what a harvest could not Miss Banks have thrust her sickle! Such extravagance, such wasteful expenditure, such a literal throwing away of money! Why, if she had only let a 'devoted' friend manage for her, she could have saved at least one half, and put besides a satisfactory sum into that friend's own pocket.

For a minute or two she felt too angry to speak. It was like seeing the horse she might have backed, but did not, win; like having been cheated out of a successful ticket in a lottery. She made a feint of reading the letter over a second time in order to steady her voice and conquer all trace of irritation.

Lady Moffat, watching her, had no more idea than a child of the storm raging within.

At last she finished, took off her spectacles, folded up the letter, and crossed her hands upon it.

'Well, what do you think of *that?*' asked Lady Moffat impatiently, sure of receiving sympathy in abundance.

But she was mistaken.

'It is a very nice kind letter,' answered Miss Banks.

Lady Moffat raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders.

'But most unreasonable?' she suggested.

'I am inclined to think Sir John is quite right,' said Miss Banks.

'Right?' repeated Lady Moffat. 'And you have always told me it was ridiculous to live as if we had not a couple of hundred a year, that we ought to launch out for the sake of the children, and keep up some sort of an appearance befitting Sir John's known rank and reputed wealth.'

'Well?' observed Miss Banks.

Lady Moffat was fast working herself into a fit of passion. Indeed, she had only paused for an instant to take breath; but that calm 'Well?' acted upon her like a douche of cold water.

In an instant she seemed to feel deserted, helpless. Her ally was abandoning the cause; worse still, going over to the enemy. This woman who had remarked a score of times men were all alike,

that whilst they spent themselves, they could not endure their wives to ask for a sovereign, she—she—first of all declared Sir John was right, and then, when her own very words were repeated in her ears, said, 'Well?'

'Surely,' went on Miss Banks, 'there is some difference between wild prodigality and a generous expenditure; between waste and liberality. I had not the faintest idea you were spending such sums as are here mentioned, or I am sure I should, even at the risk of offending you, have ventured to remonstrate. I repeat, I think there are reason and wisdom in every word Sir John writes. So far as my experience goes, there are not many husbands who would take such a state of affairs so quietly. He must,' she added meditatively, 'be enormously rich.'

'And if he is, why can't he let me spend what I like?' asked Lady Moffat angrily, yet weakly.

'He tells you why in this letter,' said Miss Banks. 'He says no income would stand it, and what he says is perfectly true.'

'But you advised me to have most, if not all, the things that I ordered.'

'I never advised you, I am sure, to pay such prices for them as you must have done. But it really is no business of mine, Lady Moffat. I am foolish to interfere between husband and wife, and perhaps more foolish still to say I certainly believe you are in the wrong. I think we had better not talk of this matter any more to-night. To-morrow you may perhaps look differently on the subject; so if you will excuse me I should like to go to bed.'

'I do not consider it is very nice of you, after having got me into such a mess, to leave me alone to scramble out of it.'

Miss Banks would not answer. She pretended, indeed, not to hear the sentence; and, saying 'Good-night' with much dignity and distinctness, walked out of the room.

Next morning she announced that it was necessary for her to return to town immediately.

'My poor invalid is not so well,' she explained, 'and it is quite essential I should go to look after him. I cannot thank you enough, dear Lady Moffat,' she proceeded, studiously averting her eyes from dear Lady Moffat's face, which was pale and anxious,

'for giving me such a treat as this delightful visit has been. I am sure I shall never forget your kindness.'

Then there was a scene. To her intense astonishment, Lady Moffat burst into tears, and entreated Miss Banks not to go.

'I offended you last night,' she said; 'I know I did, and I am sorry. I was ill and worried. Don't leave me; pray, pray don't!'

Miss Banks was full of regrets, but declared there was no help for it. Judiciously ignoring the question of offence, she declared she had received such an account of her poor patient creature that she could not rest until she was with him.

'He is subject to bad attacks,' she said, 'and when he is suffering he cannot bear any one about him but myself.'

'You will come back, though?' persisted Lady Moffat.

'I do not think I must promise that,' said Miss Banks; but her tone was as one who might be persuaded.

'O, do, do promise!' cried her hostess, taking

Miss Banks' lean unlovely hand in hers, and growing quite demonstrative in the earnestness with which she urged her petition.

'Well, I don't know what to say about it, I am sure,' said Miss Banks, pressing Lady Moffat's fingers in return, and murmuring, 'You dear kind soul! Travelling, you see, is so expensive.'

'O, if that is all, let me pay your fare. You won't mind, will you? You would not object if you were travelling with me. How much is it? Will five pounds be enough?'

'It is no wonder the money goes,' said Miss Banks, in mild rebuke. 'My dear, I cannot do it. In the first place, you must begin and be very economical, to please that good wise husband of yours; and besides—'

'What besides?' asked Lady Moffat as her friend paused.

'Well, why should I not be quite frank with you?' said Miss Banks, with a charming candour. 'After I left you last night I began to think over affairs, and after a fashion to compare my small way with yours, and it seemed quite clear to me I ought

to be home looking after things a little. That was before this letter, you understand;' and she touched her pocket, as though it contained a whole budget of bad news. 'You can never have known what it is to be forced to consider every shilling, every penny; and I could scarcely make you understand how closely I have to look after each item in our narrow household. Now, I have been away a long while, and I do not feel justified in stopping away any longer. For the sake of such a delightful time as I have passed I do not mind a little pinching when I return; but I cannot pinch my poor fellow who is so dependent upon me. Now you know all, and you must never think, if I were well off, I should, except for illness, leave you so long as you asked me to stay.'

She stopped, and, heaving a gentle sigh, watched Lady Moffat attentively. She knew she had money. Sir John said he enclosed her two hundred pounds, and Miss Banks believed it was not possible for her to have yet paid it away. Would she rise to this fly? Tiresome as she was to hook, would she swallow this bait?

Miss Banks felt doubtful, but at the same time she felt very sure that if her ladyship did not she should remain at Scarborough all alone.

In a second, bait and hook and line and everything had vanished.

'Cannot I make up all that deficiency?' asked Lady Moffat eagerly. 'Yes; how much shall you want? But never mind that now. Here is twenty pounds; take that, and we can talk about the rest when you come back. You will come back, now, won't you?'

'If I find him better,' said Miss Banks. 'But, dear Lady Moffat, I must not take this money. What would Sir John say?'

'Sir John would say nothing, except that he felt pleased. Now come back, do, and I will follow your advice. I will be more prudent. We must consult together. I think it might be well to take lodgings. What do you say?'

'I think so too, decidedly.'

With coy reluctance Miss Banks refrained from putting the note into the purse; but she kept it close at hand on the table, and it must have been a

clever person who could have got it back again, even under those apparently easy circumstances.

'Do you believe in dreams?' asked Lady Moffat, after a moment's silence, suddenly raising her eyes and fastening them on her friend's face.

Miss Banks hesitated. If she had answered truthfully, she would have said she believed in nothing, except silver and gold, and money in the funds, and little trifles of that sort. She felt strongly of opinion that Lady Moffat's creed was identical with her own; but still, she could not be quite certain, and was sharp enough, moreover, to perceive that the tone of the question did not savour altogether of incredulity.

'I have heard of some wonderful coincidences as regards dreams,' she answered cautiously.

'I have heard some persons' dreams always come true,' said Lady Moffat gloomily. 'Do you think there is anything in the idea?'

'I think it not at all improbable. Even in their waking moments many people have an uncomfortable gift of prophecy.'

Lady Moffat did not speak for a moment or two; then she said,

'I had an awful dream last night.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Miss Banks; 'what was it?'

She received no answer. Lady Moffat rose and paced the length of the room, her head bent down, and her hands clasped behind her back. Miss Banks took the opportunity of slipping the morning's gains into her pocket.

'I never used to dream,' resumed Lady Moffat, after a pause; 'I never knew till lately what it was to pass a bad night. I wonder how it is. What can be the reason?'

'You are not well,' said Miss Banks decidedly, 'and I am afraid you have been exerting and exciting yourself too much since we came here. What should you think,' she added briskly, 'of leaving Scarborough, and going to Whitby? I fancy you would be better there.'

'I should be glad to feel better anywhere,' answered Lady Moffat; 'I cannot bear lying awake, and dreaming when I fall asleep.'

'You ought to speak to the doctor about it,'

advised Miss Banks, wondering, as she spoke, how Lady Moffat would bear the wakeful nights so many of her fellow-creatures have to endure, or survive dreams that are but the distorted realities of most human lives.

'She is afraid of being alone,' considered the spinster; 'that is why she was so urgent for me to return. She would never have given me that twenty pounds if she had not expected full change out of it for herself. I should like to know what she dreamt about. If she would only tell me, I, like Daniel, might interpret it for her.'

There was no reason in the world why Miss Banks should have returned to London, since her invalid chanced, at that period, to be as well as he was ever likely to be in this world; but she had grown horribly, deadly tired of her companion, and of a life which till that morning had not resulted in one sixpence of actual profit. She had not even increased her connection—only run up against that odious Captain Battersley, between whom and herself there was a feud of many years' standing, and become acquainted with Viscount Chesunt, a person

not likely, so far as she could see, to prove of use to man, woman, or child. Scarborough had not to her proved a success, and she felt she needed a whiff of the familiar London air, and a sight of the remembered streets, to blow the cobwebs engendered by an aggravatingly easy sort of life off her brain.

She had promised herself that she would make the Moffats the most useful acquaintances she possessed, and after a month's close companionship it was only by the merest accident, only in consequence of some remarkable change of mental temperature, that she secured the 'mere trifle' Lady Moffat offered her.

Further, having said she must return to town, she knew she must adhere to her programme; for all of which reasons she started by a late train, travelling from York in the most economical manner known to railway passengers, and contenting herself on her journey with such light refreshment as she had garnered from the dessert.

'You will come back very soon?' Lady Moffat's last words of farewell; 'and if you should happen to see Sir John, you may tell him I am not at all well.'

'I shall make a point of going to Palace Gardens,' answered Miss Banks, and then she went down the stairs smiling. 'Yes, I shall certainly make a point of going to Palace Gardens,' she said to herself, and smiled again.

In the narrow house at Kensington, wedged in between two larger residences, Miss Banks did not, on her return to town, find domestic affairs going much more smoothly than they are wont to do in larger establishments. Like death, servants would appear to be no respecters of persons, and it often happened that even Miss Banks had her trials in the basement.

When she reached home on the morning after her departure from Scarborough she was greeted by Niel, who, in an easy morning undress of gray trousers and a striped jacket, seemed from his appearance to have been blackleading the grates, if, indeed, he had not been sweeping the chimneys.

'I am thankful to see you, ma'am,' he said; and indeed, to do him justice, he looked his gladness.

'Why, what has happened?' she inquired; 'my

brother'—she always called Mr. Gayford by that name when it was unnecessary to refer to him in terms of commiseration.

'He's pretty well, ma'am,' answered Niel, 'though the warm weather has tried him, as it always does, you know, ma'am. But Mrs. Nicholson and her son and daughter came yesterday afternoon; and cook she had taken herself off an hour before in a tantrum, and Jane had gone out to spend the day and never came back; she is not back yet—'

Miss Banks almost fell against the wall.

'What did you do, Niel?' she asked, in despair, for Mrs. Nicholson chanced to be a lady with whom she desired to stand well, and it was one of Miss Banks' boasts to harassed young housekeepers that she 'never had any trouble with her servants.'

'I made them as comfortable as I could, ma'am; I asked the milkman to call and tell Mrs. Hemans to come round as fast as she could, and she did; and she will send a good strong girl this morning; and we have managed, ma'am. But still it is better you should be here yourself. They are none of them stirring yet, of course.'

Happily for Miss Banks' promised return to the north, Mrs. Nicholson was merely passing through London, and did not propose just then, she said, to make any lengthened stay in the metropolis.

'We hope to be up again after Christmas,' she said, 'and then, if you can give us house-room for about a fortnight, we shall feel very grateful. A dear friend of mine, General Graham, whom I have not seen for ages—not likely, as he was in Australia and I in Canada—is returning to England, and I am hoping to see him and his daughter. Such a romance, my dear; it is like something in a story-book. I will tell it to you presently. They will be in Palace Gardens; somewhere close by here, I imagine.'

'Not very far,' said Miss Banks. 'I know a family living there; delightful people; they must call; your friends will be charmed with them, I know.'

'Like a good soul, then, do introduce them,' said Mrs. Nicholson, tying on her bonnet preparatory to a course of shopping. 'They will be lonely in London at first, I daresay; the General has been

out of the country for ages. Madgy, his daughter, was born in Australia.'

'Lady Moffat will be sure to call,' said Miss Banks. 'She is the kindest creature in the world. I have been staying with her at Scarborough.'

'Well, certainly you have the most wonderful knack of making friends,' remarked Mrs. Nicholson; 'and they are always just living in the neighbourhoods and moving in the rank one wants. As I often say, I never met with any person like you.'

Which, if Mrs. Nicholson had been wise as she was fluent, she would have considered a cause for especial thanksgiving.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR JOHN REFLECTS.

'WHEN,' advises Mr. Caxton, in the most charming of delightfully pedantic books which ever was written, 'some one sorrow that is yet reparable gets hold of your mind like a monomania; when you think, because Heaven has denied you this or that on which you had set your heart, that all your life must be a blank,—O, then diet yourself well on biography, the biography of good and great men. See how little a space one sorrow really makes in life. See scarce a page, perhaps, given to some grief similar to your own, and how triumphantly the life sails on beyond it! You thought the wing was broken. Tut, tut! it was but a bruised feather! See what life leaves behind it when all is done! A summary of positive facts, far out of the region of sorrow and suffering, linking themselves with the being of the world.'

'*That is yet reparable.*' Sir John Moffat's sorrow could not be included in such a category; yet it is undeniable, although he did not seek comfort in reading of the troubles other men had encountered, of the stormy seas they had been engulfed in, and still come safe to land, he did begin by slow degrees to feel a vague consolation in his intercourse with Mr. Woodham, and in hearing him speak of the thousand varied miseries and temptations to which poor humanity is exposed.

Hitherto he had been too apt to consider the trials of his fellows merely from a pecuniary point of view; he knew the generality of men were more or less harassed, and it seemed to him they were all more or less harassed on account of shortness of money. Now it took the form of starvation, in another not being able to meet engagements; and between these two extremes of having everything to gain and everything to lose there stretched a wide country filled with various forms of distress, all of which could be removed or alleviated by a couple of sovereigns, or a cheque filled in for a good amount. The delicate child, the sick wife, the husband out of

employment, the clerk who had embezzled, and whose master would not prosecute if the amount were made good—all these forms of sorrow could be at least assuaged by a mere wave of his wand, by the magician Gold. A man of the widest and truest benevolence, it was natural Sir John should have the most pitiful stories, the saddest narratives, confided to his ear; but yet, though the incidents and actors were diverse, one common link seemed to join them all together,—the want of money, the relief money would prove!

This was, perhaps, the reason Sir John had not hitherto found much healing for his own wound in the ointment of other persons' distress. He did not lack money; he believed gold lay at the root of every trouble he had known. But for it, he could not have thrust help on Mr. Palthorpe; had he been destitute of it, Mrs. Palthorpe never would have thrown in her lot with him. Considering, therefore, how much evil a balance at his banker's had wrought him, how little the wealth even of a Rothschild could do for him, it was perfectly natural he should regard lightly those troubles which could be salved over

with silver, the ailments capable of cure with a hundred-pound note. Mixing little amongst his fellows save in the way of business and of charity, these, however, had hitherto been almost the only sorrows (except his own) into the depths of which he had penetrated. Behind the scenes in any of life's greatest theatres he had never been; he had little even theoretical knowledge of the anguished faces that put on masks of gladness when they went forth to meet their fellows, of the hearts in which all hope and freshness and vitality died long ago, that seem as light and joyous in society as though they had never known a care.

But now the pathos and the sorrow of human life were beginning to expand their long scrolls of ever-varying, never-ceasing wrongs, sins, devices, before his eyes.

Hitherto he had been going round and round the circle of his own sin less usefully, but as wearily as a horse in a mill; with intelligent gaze he began to explore the broad avenues of open folly and grief, and the more tortuous alleys and zigzag tracks marked by the feet of men who had secretly gone astray, and

who could never make the wrong they had committed right in time or in eternity.

The son, round whom his parents' hopes and desires had centred, flinging off all restraint, and madly plunging into the vortex of dissipation; the mother of a family, not dead, as many imagined, but lost more hopelessly than if she had been in her grave; the child of hope and prayer missing out of the home, his name never mentioned, a vacant place where his portrait had hung, and a void which could not be filled in hearts that once beat high in expectation of a brilliant future; here the head of a household absent, and a raving maniac bearing some faint resemblance to him, wearing out his weary days in a private asylum; there a young wife, rich, noble, dying of a painful and insidious disease.

Money! If there could have been temporal salvation in it, these people had lacked no manner of thing that was good; they were all rich. If thousands and tens of thousands could buy reason or goodness or health or virtue, erase the lines traced on the soul by sin, or efface the brand of disgrace, they had been forthcoming. Money could do liter-

ally nothing for such as these; its possession only gave them leisure for brooding over the troubles it could not remove.

'When I lived down in the East of London,' said Mr. Woodham, 'I thought the sufferings of the busy poor very great, as most undoubtedly they are; but since I have been in the West, I have come to the conclusion the misery of the idle rich is infinitely worse. The first travel a hard stony road; but the last know no rest. They are for ever labouring on the treadmill of their own memories, sorrows, disappointments. As a rule, wealthy people seem to me most wretched. Underneath all the purple and fine linen there are sores, real and fancied, worse than any galling the beggar at Dives' gate.'

Sir John winced; the truth in this remark touched him. Why, he would have been a beggar gladly could he, by the mere act of casting aside his riches, cast aside his trouble likewise. Had not he too for years and years and years been labouring upon one weary treadmill? Did ever criminal pursue that cruel and useless toil with greater industry? Did not his purple and fine linen, his splendid house,

his riches, conceal a sore from which all honest eyes would turn shocked and astonished? It was true, quite true; and there were hundreds, thousands, affected with diseases as fatal to all happiness, if not exactly similar in their cause. No, his case could not be considered the exception he had imagined it. In the world he was not the only leper. Moving amongst their healthier fellow-creatures, and apparently like them in all respects, walked men who, were they only seen stripped of all conventional disguise, would be found covered from head to foot with a disease, in comparison to which the physical leprosy of Gehazi was clean.

Had he made the best of his position? Sir John commenced to feel very doubtful on this point. He began to marvel whether he had repented as he ought—borne as he ought. That he was being aroused by some means from a morbid condition of mind is certain, from the fact that occasionally he found himself trying to look at his life from the point of view bystanders would take of it.

Suppose another man stood exactly where he stood, no past or present circumstance altered, what

should he think of his conduct? If called upon to give a dispassionate opinion, what could he say?

Sir John did not know what to answer. That he was wrong somewhere, he felt. That in trying to atone for one false step he had simply gone on making more false steps, he was beginning to perceive. The sin had been bad enough, and then he had piled upon it concealment and false pretences, and a deceit which was none the less dangerous because it was silent, and untruths acted though not spoken, so that indeed his last state was worse than his first.

Another view of the question also came to perplex him. How far had he been honest even to his own heart? Had he made no mistake regarding his feelings? Was there no cause but one for the remorse so deep and real?

What if he had been happy in his home instead of wretched? what if the woman to whom his lot was linked had loved, studied, appreciated him, sympathised with his sorrow, striven to soothe his life? Would he have repented so bitterly then?

Had the consciousness of his mistake quickened

his moral perceptions? Was it just possible that, mingled with the remorse he truly felt for having deceived Mr. Palthorpe, was grief because he had likewise deceived himself?

A man not given to self-analysis, to asking his inner self the cause for this, the reason for that, more ready to accept results than to ask whence they arose, he had never before, save in the vaguest way, imagined that his sorrow for that fatal step might be at all induced by the evil domestic fortune which had followed it. Now, however, when he heard of men saying they could not repent because sin was so sweet, they had found life so happy though spent in wrong-doing, love so strong it made them forget or defy all fear of punishment, he stood still and examined his own heart in silence.

He could not tell whether, if guilt had proved pleasant to him, he might have looked at existence through such dark glasses as was the case. He did not feel sure of himself. He knew he should have abhorred his own treachery, but he might not have found existence so gloomy. He tried to find a parallel case in fact or fiction; but he tried in vain.

'Nature,' says Lord Lytton, 'casts nothing in stereotype.' And the same remark holds good with regard to human experience; no two experiences ever are or ever can be identically similar: in the broad outline there may be a resemblance which at first misleads a superficial observer; but come to examine the filling up closely, and points of difference will be found at every turn.

Still the endeavour did him good. As virtue is its own reward, so the unusual effort of searching into the recesses of other human hearts strengthened this man, who hitherto had but vaguely understood the workings of his own. It furnished also food for thought. So kindly and sympathetic a nature could not but feel taken out of itself when contemplating the countless modes in which mankind can make itself, or be made, wretched; the way in which it will plunge into error when it might walk safely hand in hand with right; the curious perversity with which it chooses darkness rather than light, and the persistent delight it seems to take in thwarting every effort to insure its comfort and happiness.

It was well he had found some other subject for

contemplation besides the ruin of his own life, for just at that time he began to imagine that Holyrood House was likely to thrust more difficulties upon him than he had bargained for. Fashion having marked Lady Moffat for her own, there was no concealing the fact that extravagance had commenced to inoculate the establishment. There are residences that almost as surely bring ruin upon their owners as particular shops which produce bankruptcy in tradesmen; and the bulk of mansions now built for gentlemen making their money in the City are admirably contrived for conducting merchant princes to Portugal-street or the Continent.

Rachel had been right when she said the house in Palace Gardens was not a place in which to live. To dine in with a large number of guests; to give balls in to an immense circle of acquaintances; to dress in for going out to other dinners and balls given by people of the same rank in life, and residing in mansions of a similar type; to compel the maintenance of far too many servants; to give employment to tradesmen, who, making money easily, and charging fancy prices for their goods, themselves

fell into reckless improvident habits, and followed their betters to ruin, for all these purposes, and many more of a like description, Holyrood House was admirably adapted; but as a home it could not but be regarded as an entire mistake.

In self-defence almost a man had to invite visitors. If left alone in the house, the only thing he could do would be to ask himself where he could go to get out of it. Sir John had thought rashly it would be possible to live in any residence with a moderate profusion, a wise liberality, but he found this to be a mistake.

In great mansions built for a different rank in olden times a portion can be shut off, a suite of rooms closed at pleasure; but in houses which are built for the newly rich this is not possible. They are meant to be fully inhabited at once and always; they are staring inside as well as out; there is no modest reticence about any part of them; if there were a thousand rooms they would all present themselves to view. They are like Hampton Court, a suite of apartments; but unlike Hampton Court they

have not quiet out-of-the-way nooks and corners to which the public are not admitted.

To a gentleman of quiet tastes, who saw no particular necessity for travelling the road to insolvency as some people take their last earth's journey to the grave, attended with a great show of pomp and ceremony and a number of ravening tradesmen and mercenary retainers, such a place was a mere white elephant, and likely to become quite as irksome.

Sitting in his library, the most habitable room on the ground-floor, Sir John Moffat had thought out this question when reviewing the events of the past few months, and as seriously begun to repent his investment as he had marrying his wife. When he went down to Scarborough he found the same considerations forced upon him by one of those modern caravanserai so largely affected by wealthy travellers on the road to ruin; and when he returned home he had plenty of food for similar reflections in the conduct of Lady Moffat, and a certain matter connected with his daughter which caused him more uneasiness than at first so slight a circumstance might seem to warrant.

'Papa,' said Rachel one morning, when, having finished breakfast, they stood down together on the terrace looking at the blue haze that lay over the thorns and yews in Kensington Gardens, betokening a sultry day, 'are you angry with Edwina?'

He looked at her in mild amazement.

'No, my dear; what put such an idea into your head? why should I be angry with Edwina?'

'She is afraid you are displeased with her; that she has vexed you.'

'No, she has not vexed me; at least, when I say I wish she would wear longer dresses, and put up her hair instead of letting it stream down her back like the woman in Mrs. Allen's advertisements, I am not really vexed. I dislike the style of dress she affects; but as I see other girls go about looking even faster and madder than herself, I suppose I ought to be satisfied.'

'Dear papa, it is not that I mean,' said Rachel. 'She is having new dresses made, and she will put up her hair when we can find a way of dressing it that suits her. She wants to please you; she is so afraid you are angry, and, indeed, she meant no harm.'

'I have not the faintest notion, Rachel, what you are talking about,' said Sir John. 'I brought her back with me because I thought she would be better at home than at Scarborough; but I am not so unreasonable as to find any fault with her, poor child; that would indeed be foolish.'

'Yes,' agreed Rachel. 'And besides, she meant no harm; it was only once.'

'We are certainly playing at cross-purposes,' interrupted Sir John. 'What was only once?'

'Going out for a sail with Mr. Lassils.'

'*Who* is Mr. Lassils?'

'I am sure I do not know, papa. He was here at the ball, and Wina has met him a few times since, and then he joined her and the boys that morning when they were on the sands; and poor Wina had no idea it would displease you, or I know she would not have gone in the boat. She has been quite unhappy about it. She thinks you must have felt very angry, or you would not have brought her off in such a hurry.'

To describe the astonishment depicted on Sir John's countenance would be impossible.

'I know nothing about the matter,' he said. 'You can tell Edwina I had no idea she had been on the water, and that, till this minute, I never heard Mr. Lassils' name. However,' he added, 'I am all the more glad I brought her home with me. I wonder she did such a thing. Surely she is old enough to have known better, even though no one might be at hand to tell her she was wrong.'

'I assure you, papa, Dwina had not the least thought of doing wrong. She went just as a child might have done; she did not suppose there was any impropriety in going. Mr. Lassils is nothing to her, as she says. He told them all—that is, I mean Dwina and the boys — he was "booked." Don't look so shocked, please, papa,' added Rachel, laughing. 'I am only repeating what I believe he really said—"Booked to eighty thousand pounds. There is a rock," he exclaimed, "for a War-Office limpet to stick to." What is the matter, papa? Do you think such a remark very dreadful?'

'No,' answered Sir John; 'it is not that. Young folks in the present day do use expressions which seem very odd to old people; but I suppose when I

was young myself I employed eccentricities of language that exasperated my elders. No, it is not that, Rachel; only—can such a thing be possible as that Edwina is thinking already about love and lovers? Why, it seems scarcely a day since she was a baby.'

Wherein Sir John was not exaggerating. In a monotonous life, whether it be happy or miserable, the years look short when man gazes back over them.

'She is seventeen, papa,' said Rachel, shaking her pretty head sagely.

'Seventeen, indeed,' he repeated; 'and how old is seventeen? She ought to be thinking of dolls instead of lovers.'

'Long dresses notwithstanding,' said the girl archly. 'But she is not thinking of lovers, papa, though I suppose lovers will be soon thinking of her; she is so pretty. Every one admires Dwina.'

Sir John looked suddenly up—suddenly and strangely, Rachel thought—in her face. What did he see in it? Nothing to remind him of the beautiful woman who had crossed his path and led him

away to ruin—nothing of the sort. A pair of blue eyes gazing across the vista of years, which at that moment did not appear narrow; a sweet frank smile, with nevertheless a sad foreboding wistfulness shadowing it; a tender gratitude which pierced his heart. Ah, she was like him—like the dead father she had never seen, never since babyhood heard of, whose name, if she had ever known it, she had long since forgotten, who was for her as though he had never existed, whose place and memory were filled by another. It was but for a moment; then, the past dropping out of sight, the future, with its certain difficulties, rose before him. Nerving himself to face it, he said,

'And you, Rachel; do you ever think of such things?'

She answered readily and innocently, though blushing, as even girls quite heart-whole will blush at such questions,

'I, papa? O, no. It would not be any good, you know. I am going to be an old maid.'

'An old maid!' repeated Sir John, gazing upon her fresh young beauty, her calm brow, her fair

loveliness, which was at once intensely womanly and softly angelic, with a different feeling stirring in his breast from any which had ever before moved him to emotion. He had always, he knew, hoped she never would marry, that the story might remain hidden, the secret of her birth untold; but now, he thought, were such a lot really in store for her, O, the pity of it! How such a nature would be loved! how it could love! what sunshine it might shed around some happy dwelling! how she would delight in the voices of her children, and share all the joys and sorrows of her husband! Ah, no! ah, no! Whatever the trouble to him, when, in some good future day, one worthy of her gained her heart and sought her hand, Sir John would speed his suit.

'Why do you talk such nonsense, child?' he asked.

'It is not nonsense, papa,' she answered. 'It is not I alone who say it. Mamma and Dwina often tell me I shall never be married, and the very servants feel sure I was "cut out for an old maid." I am going to stay with you always, papa. You remember we settled that long ago.'

He laid his hands on her shoulders, and gazed upon her with such an exceeding anguish in his worn face, with such a depth of trouble in his eyes, that Rachel, who knew how far from happy his life had been, how little happiness it was ever likely to hold, felt her own filling with tears.

'God forbid, dear, that I should be so selfish as to wish such a thing,' he said; and just touching her forehead with his lips, he hurriedly left the room.

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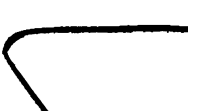
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